Barbara Picks a Husband

By

Hermann Hagedorn



Class PZ3

Book .H120

Copyright No. Ba

copy 2

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.

BARBARA PICKS A HUSBAND



THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK · BOSTON · CHICAGO · DALLAS
ATLANTA · SAN FRANCISCO

MACMILLAN & CO., LIMITED
LONDON · BOMBAY · CALCUTTA
MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, LTD.
TORONTO



BARBARA PICKS A HUSBAND

A COMEDY IN NARRATIVE

BY

HERMANN HAGEDORN

FRONTISPIECE BY

J. PAUL VERREES

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1918

All rights reserved

Copy 2

PZ3
H120
Ba
cop 2

COPYRIGHT, 1918
BY THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

Set up and electrotyped. Published, June, 1918

JUN 26 1918

©CLA497904

no 2

TO

EIGHT SISTERS

A

MOTHER-IN-LAW

AND AN

ADOPTED GRANDMOTHER

IN WONDER, RESPECT AND

AFFECTION

BARBARA PICKS A HUSBAND

I

THERE was something wrong with the dinner-party, no question.

It wasn't the dinner. That had proceeded from the subterranean cave of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, as Mrs. Collingwood's now departed husband had once, during a domestic upheaval, dubbed Mrs. Collingwood's kitchen; and therefore was as perfect as Mrs. Collingwood's masterly mind could conceive and Ali Baba, superb, eloquent, and lately from Paris, could execute. It moved along quietly and without a hitch from appetizer and oysters to nuts and demi-tasse, served in silence and — here was the trouble — nibbled at by the ladies and devoured by the young men with a weak attempt at conversation which was worse than silence. By the time the soup was cold in Barbara Collingwood's plate, the ignominious failure of her dinner-party was imminent.

Barbara glanced through a rosy forest of candles and shades at her mother. But Mrs. Collingwood, in her calm and austere beauty, was looking into space, while she pretended to listen to the over-gallant gabble of little Chester Howell, who never doubted that he was giving her a memorable time.

Barbara bit her lip. Her mother had disapproved of the party from the first. But why couldn't she be a sport and help to make it something other than an utter gloom? There was indubitably a hard streak in her mother, she said to herself, a strain of iron-ribbed self-righteousness come down to her from her New England ancestors.

Barbara turned to the neighbor on her right. His

name was Cleve Winsor, and a month ago she had never laid eyes on him and had heard only that he was an established misogynist (at twenty-four) after a career, beginning at sixteen, which had brought him a reputation that could be discussed only in whispers and the dark. Her arm tingled and the blood stole over her face as she touched the sleeve of his dress-coat in an effort to save a candle-shade from the destruction by fire which for a moment threatened it. She wanted to ask Cleve Winsor about his birth, his education, his family, his views on life, death and immortality, on votes for women, feminism, psychical research, Strindberg and the novels of Robert W. Chambers. But what she did ask was: "Don't you wish the war would be over soon?"

He replied with what was in that second year of the Great War already beginning to be the obvious reply. Peace was very desirable, of course, but he hoped there would be no peace before Germany was definitely crushed, and so forth.

Little Chester Howell, who had a German mother whom he adored, went up into the air at this in his own absurd, attractive way which everybody loved. Brilliantly, and not sparing Barbara Collingwood's right-hand neighbor in his denunciation of the Great American Public, "echoing like empty-headed parrots the pompous eloquence of fatuous old college presidents and unpatriotic editorial-writers bought with English gold," he rose to the defense of the Fatherland. He had the gift of speech, and the fact that he stuttered occasionally so that the words seemed to fall over each other for a minute like clowns in a circus, merely added to the impression of ardent, overwhelming sincerity.

"Isn't he a duck?" whispered a round-faced, baby-eyed young lady, whose name was Delia, to the rather grave young man who sat next to her, and who, when necessary, answered to the name of Tom Paraway.

The young man smiled faintly. "Look out, Delia. He's probably carrying a bomb."

Delia gave a squeak of delicious fright. "Oh, do you think he'll poison the salad?"

Chester caught the remark and, not being blessed with a sense of humor, launched into an occasionally impeded torrent of impassioned discourse on anti-German hysteria. Every one was fascinated. The dinner-party was saved. Barbara blessed Chester Howell and thought him the cleverest of mortals, for all his dear literalness. And then Mrs. Collingwood spoke.

"I think all the nations are just in a class with thieves and murderers," she said in her emphatic way. "It's just the Devil in them, and I don't understand how any sane person can honestly defend any of them."

That was the end, of course. Barbara tried to heal the breach with a quick laugh. "What perfect neutrality!" she exclaimed to the table in general, in tones which did not entirely hide her vexation. "Don't you think mother ought to put herself on exhibition?"

The remark was not kind, and Mrs. Collingwood leaned forward with a faint, quizzical smile, and drew toward her a saltcellar which she had no intention of using. Tom Paraway, at Barbara's left, felt sorry for her and sorrier that Barbara had lost her temper again.

But, indeed, the provocation was not small. Conversation died without hope.

For there was no debating a dictum of Mrs. Collingwood's. There was too much depth of feeling behind it, too much passionate conviction. She was, it seems, an indomitable pacifist, opposed to the use of force between nations as between individuals. And when she saw a child abused, threatened or struck, strong men could scarcely hold her back from immediate, reckless assault. Illogical? So much the worse for logic. No one, being granted omnipotence for an hour, would have wanted to

make any changes in Mrs. Collingwood. No one, that is, with the exception of Barbara.

Chester Howell made no attempt to combat the sweeping denunciation of his hostess, but sank back into his chair with an expression on his wrinkled forehead and around the corners of his queer, flat nose, comically like that of a rubber rooster suddenly deflated, wondering whether Mrs. Collingwood (on whom he rather wanted to make an impression) thought him more dishonest than insane or more insane than dishonest. Tom Paraway, remembering his own frivolous remark, felt as though he had been caught batting balls with a crucifix. Cleve Winsor thanked his stars that he had been merely obvious. Delia giggled. Ruth Torrey, slender, delicate, lily-like, looked unhappy. But Barbara was clenching her hands under the table. The dinner-party was gone.

The dinner would have gone to pieces sooner or later in any event, for it happened that the three men present were all in love with the same girl. Barbara had had her own devilish ideas in bringing together at one table the man who had been in love with her since her childhood — that was Tom; the man who had been rushing her frantically since the beginning of this, her second season — that was Chester Howell; and this new Lochinvar from Minnesota, whose slightest touch made the blood creep up her cheeks and whose look made her dizzy.

The fatal combination had been no blundering accident. Not very many things were accidental with Barbara. The dinner-party had been carefully thought out in the silence of her soul, and then decreed. She desired, of course to impress. Whom she wanted most to impress she herself did not know — her mother, possibly; Delia and Ruth without question; and, of course, the three young men, but which of the three the most of all she could not quite decide.

Here lay the germ of trouble, and Barbara knew it.

She was clear-eyed and she had imagination. She knew as well as she knew anything that she would be married within a year or less. Women seem to know those things by virtue of that gift which Man respectfully, and not without a certain helpless fear, calls "intuition," and science, the cold-blooded, calls something else. Delia would have greeted such a prospect for herself with a shout, without worrying overmuch concerning the identity of her victim, for she was not exacting. But Barbara was very exacting. What she had to give possibly exercised her mind less than what she expected to receive. She rated herself high. The man she married must be successful, rich, absolutely devoted to her, absolutely true to her, romantic but not jealous, heroic (if possible), interested somewhat but not too deeply in literature, a good hand at bridge and at tennis, a perfect dancer and conversationalist, one always to be proud of, yet always secure on the leash, a combination of a Crown Prince and a pet Pom.

Barbara, pretending to eat her sweetbreads, told herself that in a year, garbed in some exquisite and yet unimagined dressing-gown, she would be having breakfasts alone with one of these three young men now munching nuts like squirrels about this formal table. And with a touch of terror at her heart she wondered which it would be.

The dinner dragged on its weary way through course after course, and topic after topic of lifeless conversation. Everybody was bored, Barbara could see clearly enough; and worse, everybody seemed sinking, minute by minute, out of sight in a quicksand of indigo blues. With the exception of Chester Howell's, there was scarcely a voice that dared to raise itself above a whisper. Tom and Young Lochinvar exchanged cold, thoughtful glances; Mrs. Collingwood answered questions courteously, but otherwise seemed tongue-tied; Delia chattered in low tones

to Chester when he was not holding forth on one of a dozen things he cared nothing about; and Ruth, torn between affection and the ache of a bitter jealousy no one would have suspected her of hiding behind that lily-like face, looked sleepless about the eyes and ready for tears. The First and Second Butlers moved about with conscious mournfulness, like ushers at a funeral.

Contrary to the expectations of the diners, the elaborate meal came to an end at last. The Second Butler whispered something in the ear of the First Butler, and the First Butler bore the intelligence to Mrs. Collingwood as though aware of its serious import. The theater-bus was waiting. The ladies rustled charmingly upstairs and down again for cloaks and scarfs; and Chester Howell, impressionable and twenty-two, gave a sigh for the good old days of polygamy.

He stood at the door as Barbara passed out, his face flushed with enthusiasm, his tan-colored eyes lit with a fire he made no attempt to conceal. "You're wonderful!" he whispered. "I'm crazy mad about you!"

She laughed tantalizingly, lifting her chin and giving him a swift glance that might mean everything or nothing at all, according to the vanity of the recipient.

Chester gasped ardently; but at that moment Tom Paraway touched Barbara's elbow and helped her down the stoop. "You need some sleep, old girl," he whispered.

She shrugged her shoulders. "Don't be a gloom, Tom. Isn't this party festive enough without your playing grandpa?"

"That's all right," he answered cheerfully. "Grandpa has his uses."

She hummed a half dozen notes impatiently, but the humming ceased of a sudden, for Cleve Winsor was standing at the door of the bus. She gave him a quick flashing smile that seemed to light fires in his rather expressionless eyes. He held her arm firmly as she entered the car, and

for a second she hesitated on the step and swayed a little, suddenly faint. His strong hand pushed her gently forward. She sank down at the farther end of the bus, struggling to control her quick breathing.

II

THE performance was all that the members of Mrs. Collingwood's box-party expected of it. To Delia every new comic opera was a new vital experience, furnishing fresh glimpses of dazzling ecstasy. She welcomed every joke as though it were the first that Adam had cracked, and she were Eve, and this were Paradise. The music excited her. The indiscriminate love-making seemed to her thrillingly romantic.

Every one else expected to be bored, and was not disappointed. To Barbara comic operas were a part of the social system, to be endured as gracefully as one endured receptions and bridge and similar matters which one might conceivably dispense with if one were free to choose. To enjoy them as frankly as Delia enjoyed them was vulgar; to call them the stupid inanities that they were was "high-brow." One accepted them as a matter of course, as a well-bred person accepted everything from sin to canvas-back duck. Ruth, who was conscientious, thought of the wasted time and of her father, alone at home; answering distantly and half-heartedly the frivolous remarks which Chester Howell, seeing Barbara absorbed in Cleve Winsor, chose to address to her.

Mrs. Collingwood sat in the rear of the box with Tom Paraway, uncomplainingly enduring. They were excellent friends, for all Mrs. Collingwood's forty-five years and Tom Paraway's twenty-five; and they had a tacit understanding that Barbara was to be allowed to have her fling, but that they two would stand on guard and see that no harm should come to her.

This resolve entailed hardships; for Barbara, who could

sleep all day when she so wished, was a spendthrift of the nocturnal hours; and Tom's day began relentlessly at seven. He had been well-trained in endurance, however, by an unflinching father and a clever mother who, through a quarter century of happy union with inflexibility had been forced to achieve a certain measure of smiling endurance herself. So Tom bore up on whatever sleep he could get, grew a bit hollow in the cheeks, and clung on — not desperately, for despair was not in the family lexicon, but with a calm persistence which at times irritated Barbara to the point of sharp speech. He had proposed to her, off and on, for seven years — he seemed to remember that he had begun proposing at eighteen, though the thing had become such a habit since, that, as with most habits, its early history had become blurred in his mind.

He had proposed to her for the latest time at five-thirty that afternoon. It struck him that her refusal bore a new sincerity about it; wherefore he did not record it with Mrs. Collingwood, as his playful custom was.

From the rear of the box, he glared at the silly performance, where wish-wash alternated only with vulgarity, jingling, jangling on through illimitable deserts of tawdry trash. He wondered for what particular sins he was being punished.

Barbara watched the stage, but he could see that she was happily unconscious of what was going on there. She was listening to the discourse of Young Lochinvar, who was leaning so close to her that his forehead now and again touched a stray wisp of her hair, silhouetted against the brightness of the stage.

Tom gritted his teeth, and rapidly mated the proverbial two and two. It was a month ago that Barbara had been bridesmaid at a wedding in Minneapolis. It was the evening following her return that she had given him what had been up to that time her most emphatic "No." Cleve Winsor was from Minneapolis.

He brought the man's face before his mental vision — the popular-fiction lines, the " straight nose, square chin " and so forth, which could be called " clear-cut " only by a stretch of the romantic fancy that ignored the unmistakable marks of weakness and self-indulgence.

Tom Paraway's heart sank a little. He could make up his mind to be a good loser, if necessary, but, for other reasons than his own happiness, he did not like to think of yielding the prize to this frontispiece hero, sitting with arms folded — quite in the approved fashion of heroes — a little behind the left shoulder of his lady. He suspected that living with Cleve Winsor might prove a difficult business for a proud, exacting, slightly vain, delicate, high-strung creature like Barbara. Of course, living with Barbara would be no sinecure. He himself was willing to take the risk, seeing the perils clearly, and, therefore, not utterly unprepared. Living with any one in holy wedlock was difficult, he surmised.

Mrs. Collingwood was sitting beside him with eyes closed. Her face seemed extraordinarily noble to him in its finely chiseled repose. He would have said that her ancestors had been well established in New York while it was yet Nieuw Amsterdam, if he had not known that the farm in Connecticut was only one generation behind her.

Slowly and a little wearily Mrs. Collingwood opened her eyes. It was possible that Barbara was an even greater strain on her than on any of the young lady's devoted admirers.

" You've been asleep," said Tom accusingly.

She laughed a low, rippling laugh, very pleasant to hear, though it ended in a curious note of defiance, as though she were telling herself, " I *will* laugh, and nothing is going to make me believe that I don't want to."

She leaned back over her chair, speaking in low tones. " I was just thinking," she said. " That is all. Do you know, I find these hours in the evening really a relief. At

home there's always something to do, a meal to order or a letter to write, or an argument with Barbara." She laughed again, not altogether mirthfully. "But I can't bring a telephone or a desk along with me to a box-party, so I use the time in setting my inner house in order. I don't find the music distracting. It seems unreal, and after the first three minutes I don't believe I even hear it."

"You're rather wonderful," he said simply.

She laughed again, and this time the laugh was hard and metallic. "Oh, heavens! Barbara has shown me up to myself."

"Exactly how do you figure that?"

"There has been something all wrong with me, or she would never have taken to the flesh-pots the way she has. Every new comic opera we go to seems to me a punishment for my sins and a screeching indictment of her bringing up. Imagine my mother letting me listen to stuff like that. But that isn't all. Imagine my mother bringing me up to be able to endure it, not to say like it. She didn't, and I loathe it. And I tried to bring up my daughter conscientiously, and she insists on having a box at every comic opera that comes to the city. And I can't bring myself to use coercion. And there you are." She tried again to laugh, but with no more success than before.

Tom Paraway stared thoughtfully over the heads of Barbara and her satellites into the dim and boisterous auditorium. "You know what I think about Barbara," he said quietly. "And I think you take the fluffy ruffles part of her too seriously."

"That's all she'll ever show me." There was a flash of resentment in her tones.

"I wonder whether she doesn't enjoy showing you what she thinks you're looking for?"

"I don't know. But I feel absolutely in her way. She knows I disapprove of her. And she doesn't seem to care.

And I can't help feeling every hour of the day and night that she's at the edge of an abyss and may fall over any minute."

"I guess you both need sleep," said Tom in his grandfatherly way.

"Perfectly absurd, as far as I'm concerned," she exclaimed. "But you do. You're wearing yourself out, Tom. Why do you do it? You're too good for her. Don't waste your best years on a heartless flirt like Barbara. There are plenty of fine girls in the world."

Tom laughed softly. "Fire away," he said. "I think you're a designing mother. You're just trying to make me sit tight. You know as well as I do that you couldn't pry me away with a crowbar."

Mrs. Collingwood laughed so whole-heartedly at that, that Barbara heard her above the clashing cymbals of the Finale and turned half round over the back of her chair. "Cheers!" she said. "Mother's laughed at a comic opera. What do you know?"

The laugh died out in a wistful look of pain which only Tom Paraway saw. The next instant Mrs. Collingwood was up on her feet directing with friendly decisiveness the bundling up of three charming young ladies, expensively, but not over heavily clad.

"Wasn't it wonderful?" cried Delia.

They all lied, agreeing that it was, no one considering the issue worth an argument; as indeed it wasn't.

Mrs. Collingwood drew the line at a supper-party dansant at "The Green Umbrella," declaring that she was not going to be even partially responsible for anybody's nervous prostration, and emphatically advising bed as the next destination. Ruth squeezed her arm gratefully and Tom Paraway inconspicuously patted her left shoulder-blade. Barbara was frankly annoyed and Delia nigh to tears, but Mrs. Collingwood pressed her lips quietly to-

gether and herself gave the chauffeur directions. She did not believe in coercion, but there were limits to license.

They dropped Ruth and Delia as near their respective beds as the curb allowed; then drove to Fifty-seventh Street. The men made their adieux at the top of the stoop.

"Won't you come in and have a bite?" said Barbara, being able at the moment to think of nothing that would annoy her mother more.

Tom Paraway spoke quickly to forestall acceptance by either of the others. "Me for bed," he said genially. "Good night. Come along, Chet. You'll lose your beauty sleep, and God knows you need every help of that sort you can get."

Chester Howell cursed him inwardly, but followed his lead; Winsor likewise. The three walked together toward Fifth Avenue, but at the corner, Winsor, slipping his hands into the pockets of his overcoat, suddenly stopped and announced that he had left his gloves at the Collingwoods'.

"Wait a second," he said. "I'll just get them."

"Oh, buy another pair," said Tom.

"Hate to. I'm broke," Winsor answered. "Just wait here. Won't be a minute." He was off.

"Some bird," remarked Tom as the figure sped westward.

"I'm thirsty," Chester confessed. "Let's have something."

"No, thanks."

"You don't want to wait for him?"

Tom was still watching a rapidly moving figure. It was ascending the Collingwood stoop now. "I certainly do."

"Do you think — they're engaged?"

"No."

"Do you think — there's — any danger?"

"Yes."

"I'm thirsty. Come on."

"No."

"You don't expect to stay here all night, do you?"

"No."

"I want a gin fizz."

"I'm not a bar-keeper."

"Come on!"

"No!"

"Good heavens! How long *do* you expect to stay?"

"That depends on the amount of nerve our young hero brought along from Minnesota. I bet on forty-five minutes."

"Are you going to murder him when he comes out?"

"No."

"What the deuce are you going to do?"

"Go to bed."

"I *am* thirsty, Tom," Chester remarked plaintively. "And it's immoral to drink alone."

"Get a soda."

"It isn't that kind of a thirst."

"Five minutes gone."

"Forty to wait?"

"More or less."

"Lord!"

They waited together with increasing grimness.

III

IN the Collingwood mansion, meanwhile, there was war. The three young men had descended the stoop. The front door was closed.

Barbara did not stop to divest herself of her wrap before firing the first gun. "Mother, you are the limit," she said.

Mrs. Collingwood's face clouded, but she did not lose her composure. She was standing on the lowest step of the stairs, with one hand on the newel-post, a queenly figure against the dull ivory of the woodwork and the soft sea-green of the stair-carpet. "What have I done now?" she asked quietly.

"You know perfectly well. At dinner. Everything was going finely, when you had to burst in. I wish you'd learn that a dinner-party isn't a missionary meeting. Nobody cares about the rights or wrongs of things at a dinner-party. People just want to have a good time. If you are going to disagree with a person at a dinner-party, you've got to disagree in a way that's going to pump new life into the talk, not kill it. But you are always so nobly earnest that when you're through talking there's not enough left of the conversation to bury."

There were red spots in Barbara's cheeks, and her lips, never too full at best, disappeared almost completely in the sharp, determined line that was her mouth. There was no question of the earnestness behind this lecture. But then, as Barbara would have been the first to explain, this was not a dinner-party. This was merely the opening round of the evening bout, which would continue, ac-

cording to the endurance of the contestants, until one, two or three o'clock, when exhaustion and tears would ring the final bell.

"I am sorry, Barbara," Mrs. Collingwood was saying. "But I can't help my convictions."

"You don't understand. It isn't your convictions. It's the way you hit people on the head with them."

"Perfectly absurd!"

"Not a bit. You do. You don't leave a hair. You're a perfect gloom."

Mrs. Collingwood twisted her lips, and bit them. There were tears in her eyes, and she did not answer at once for fear lest her voice should quaver. At heart, Mrs. Collingwood was apprehensive of the judgment this modern, self-possessed, young lady might pronounce on her own old-fashioned and not always controllable emotions. When she spoke, her voice was colder than she meant to make it.

"You know I don't approve of a good many of the things you insist on doing. The shallowness and futility of the life we have been leading these past two years seem absolutely immoral to me."

"You're extreme. You see things just your way. You're not broad-minded. You see everything from the standpoint of a moral problem. But nine times out of ten there's no question of morality, either way. You just make yourself miserable. You were brought up horribly strictly, so you don't understand. Going around the way I do isn't futile, it's just the opposite. It's broadening — and — and it's giving me the kind of a good time I want." She lifted her chin sharply.

"If you call this evening — a good time —" exclaimed Mrs. Collingwood, starting to ascend the stairs.

"I don't," Barbara retorted quickly. "But it might have been."

The door-bell rang.

"For heaven's sake! It's after midnight. Who can it be?" This from the younger lady.

The older, true to form, lost no time in speculations, but crossed swiftly to the door, and opened it.

"Why —" she ejaculated, frankly amazed.

Barbara, behind the door, turned to peek through the crack of the hinges.

"I hope I didn't scare you," said the familiar voice. "I think I left my gloves —"

Barbara felt her knees suddenly weaken and a hot tidal wave rush to her head.

"Why, it's too bad you had to bother to come back," said Mrs. Collingwood, sympathetically. She would have given the Devil himself the benefit of the doubt.

"I knew you wouldn't have gone up yet, so I thought —"

Young Lochinvar was in the hall now, with the frosty night shut out behind him. Speaking in the loose jargon of the street, he was emphatically a handsome man, and even the critical — Tom Paraway, for instance — found difficulty in proving that he was anything else. He had heighth and breadth (and possibly thickness, but that is irrelevant here); great physical strength, without question; hair, without stint, dark straight hair; a heavy neck; and a reposeful, challenging face that gave women the creeps and made them say and do foolish things in spite of resolutions. From which feature the Devil operated most effectively was a question debated not infrequently by the victims within and among themselves. The mouth, slightly drooping to almost imperceptible depressions at the corners, was arresting in its unobtrusive insolence; the eyes, deep-set and heavily shaded by the thick eyebrows, were curiously unforgettable. They had the glossy brightness and impersonal lure a painter might put into the eyes of a faun to give him the final mark of the species.

And looking into this perilous face with undisguised, eager delight, was little Barbara Collingwood, a good foot shorter than Young Lochinvar, bright-haired, bright-eyed, bright-cheeked, the mouth a little hard and sharp, the chin small but unquestionably obstinate; no great wealth of hair, but what there was, exquisite as the gold spun glass of the Venetians — damp-defying curls, incited to careful riot, and not half controlled by the band of turquoise velvet pretending to keep them where they belonged. Her blue eyes were not large, but vivid and clear. If eyes are really windows, giving a suggestion of the inside of the house, a careful observer might have concluded that behind these well-washed panes were pleasant rooms, furnished with individual taste. A glance at the lips might have made him modify his conclusion so far as to admit that for the moment, the floors and walls were probably littered with garish fandangoes out of harmony with the rest of the furniture; and that there were evidences of hasty comings and goings; but, on the whole, the house was worth inspection. Cleve Winsor evidently thought so.

Barbara turned ostensibly to hunt for the gloves, but actually to hide what she feared her cheeks and eyes were too frankly revealing. A little revelation was alluring; too much was vulgar and, incidentally, poor tactics. She did not reason that out; she knew it by that same old intuition, which science, the stony-hearted, calls something else. She did not find the gloves. She would not have found them if they had been there; and they were in the pocket of Cleve Winsor's overcoat, as that gentleman knew very well. Barbara more than suspected that the gloves were merely an excuse. She thought them a rather poor one until her critical powers an instant later were overwhelmed by admiration for the boldness of a lover not ashamed to look ridiculous. Through this emotion came

a flash of regret that Cleve Winsor's intellectual resources were not quite as limitless as his beauty; through this again, a hasty flinging out of first-line defenses.

They all hunted dutifully but without enthusiasm for the gloves, Barbara watching her mother furtively, wondering what she was thinking about Cleve Winsor and his excuse to achieve the last word, unattended by the glowering eyes of two other suitors. Mrs. Collingwood gave no sign, but her lips were compressed in a way that Barbara knew of old, and that meant that there were many things which might at the moment be profitably said if Barbara were the sort whom anybody's words could impress; since, however, Barbara seemed able to learn only by her own experience, by that experience she must learn. Silence might be painful to her mother, but silent she would be.

Mrs. Collingwood was emphatically silent.

Cleve Winsor began to wish he were back on Fifth Avenue with his rivals. In despair, Barbara threw out the tentative suggestion that the Second Butler, being a recent addition to the household, was not above suspicion.

It happened that Young Lochinvar knew the dramatic value of self-sacrifice.

"I won't let you blame the butler," he cried, pulling the gloves from his pocket. "Here they are!"

Barbara felt the blood rush to her face again. She wondered whether any one would ever break the silence that followed. It never occurred to her to break it herself.

"Why —" exclaimed Mrs. Collingwood, helplessly. Then she laughed a little, mirthless laugh which said to Barbara, more clearly than words, "What do you think of your friend now?"

Winsor divined what lay behind the laugh. "Forgive me, Mrs. Collingwood," he said, with charming contrition. "I just had to come back to say good night. I've come

all the way from Minnesota, you know, to see Barbara, and seeing her in a crowd doesn't seem like really seeing her. You will forgive me, won't you? "

Mrs. Collingwood looked at him, and felt something in her draw back in loathing. She detested smooth words always, but behind Cleve Winsor's was a subtle wooing that made her want to scream.

"Forgive!" she cried, as though the matter were absurdly out of her domain. "Don't ask *me* to forgive! Barbara's grown up. She must solve her own problems. I try to keep hands off."

Barbara looked at her with tight lips and steady, cool eyes. "Do you, though?" she said to herself.

The intruder smiled, ingratiatingly. "Do I constitute a problem?" he asked.

Mrs. Collingwood looked at him straightly, not unconscious of the veiled insolence of his manner. "Don't ask me," she said. "Barbara will have to settle that."

Barbara side-stepped the responsibility with the mendacious assertion that she was ravenously hungry; and suggested an invasion of the pantry. Young Lochinvar remarked that he did not want to keep the ladies up, to which Barbara replied that two in the morning was her conservative bedtime, calling on Mrs. Collingwood for corroboration.

"Come on," she cried, leading the way to the stronghold of the First and Second Butler. Cleve Winsor followed her through the delicately furnished gray and ivory drawing-room, through the dining-room, all mahogany, except the floor, into the sequestered pantry.

Mrs. Collingwood stood motionless a second or two, biting her lips in her effort to keep back the tears. As usual, the tears were forced to subside even before they had reached the rims of her eyes. She turned quickly and went upstairs, for fear of making it appear that she thought chaperonage necessary; and, being old-fashioned, sat

down and read again and again all that David, King of Israel, had to say concerning the snare of the fowler and the noisome pestilence.

Cleve Winsor, meanwhile, happily unconscious that the forces of the Lord were being mustered against him on the floor above, proceeded to make love by the directest method he knew. He took Barbara into his arms and kissed her more times than any one need ever know. She gasped and trembled, deliriously happy. He whispered her name over and over again, kissing her until her face seemed to burn; and a sudden revulsion of feeling brought a spring deluge of tears. She struggled to free herself, but he would not let her go, whispering that he loved her, and that she must marry him and that all his life should be hers.

"Please let me go," she said in a voice so quiet, so controlled that he was deceived into believing that the storm was over.

"I can't, I can't," he whispered. "I've just won you. How can I let you go?"

He heard her draw in her breath sharply, and a second later her hands, which had hung limply at her side, seemed to shoot upward between them. He felt the small fists pounding against his chest. There was a savage flare in her eyes, an uncanny jungle light. He expected any instant to feel her fingers on his throat. He released her.

She staggered backward a step on two against the sink, and for what seemed a long time, they stood staring at each other, breathing heavily. The light fell full on her face, and he was struck by the ravages their moment of wild impulse had made there. It was not only that her hair was all at sixes and sevens and her cheeks were scarlet and her bosom rising and falling tumultuously; there was actual tragedy in her eyes. Cleve, looking at her, troubled and helpless in the presence of a spiritual struggle he did

not remotely understand, cursed himself only for botching a situation that had promised so well. He had gone ahead too fast, he said to himself, and she was frightened.

He felt a sudden ache at the pathetic picture she made, and took a step toward her, holding out his hand, friendly-wise.

She laid her own on it an instant limply, and let it fall again; for the fellowship of it started the tears, and she did not dare yield to tears just then. He continued to look at her, altogether helpless now. It seemed to Barbara that he was far more handsome than she had supposed. The aggressiveness and covert insolence were gone; the lines were all softened by a tenderness that was new to her in that face. She stared at him in mute appeal — for what, she did not know. She was only dimly conscious that she, who had been merrily disporting herself in the front yard of the house of life, found herself suddenly on the very threshold of the mysteries.

At last, without a word, she turned, snapped out the light in the pantry and proceeded back to the hall with Young Lochinvar at her heels. At the doorway between the dining-room and living-room, she hesitated, clutching at the hangings and turning half toward him.

"I forgot — all about the eatables," she said. "Don't you want some cookies and ginger-ale?"

"No, thank you," he said quietly.

Without further speech they walked to the front door. He drew on his coat and, with a whimsical, contrite smile, pulled the memorable gloves from his pocket and looked at them for an instant.

Barbara smiled faintly, and again, for some reason or other, the tears threatened her composure.

"Suppose we divvy?" said he, holding out one of the gloves.

She took it, dreamily. The front door opened and shut. Cleve Winsor was gone. Mechanically she thrust the

white glove into the bosom of her dress and sat down on the lower step of the stairs and wept convulsively.

Mrs. Collingwood, struggling, not with perfect success, to concentrate on David, King of Israel, heard the closing of the door, and closed the book, awaiting with what composure she could muster, Barbara's ascent and the argument that was sure to follow. She did not hear the expected step on the stair. Instead, she heard the sound of sobbing. In a moment she was kneeling at Barbara's side, holding the cold, lifeless hand. Without a word, she began to rub it, but Barbara withdrew it almost fiercely, and like a flash was on her feet, and running up the stairs.

Mrs. Collingwood heard a door closed sharply and the turning of a key. Her own face was like carved stone as she slowly ascended to her bedroom.

IV

CHESTER HOWELL shared Tom Paraway's vigil for ten minutes, and then, unable to endure the prospect of thirty-five more, hailed a taxi, returning from uptown, and departed for that green oasis near the Grand Central over which the ghost of Eli Yale presides. There was no time for farewells. There was a tooting three blocks away, a dash, and Tom Paraway was on guard by himself. He walked slowly up and down, with eyes fixed on the Collingwood stoop, a hundred or more yards away on the farther side of the street, five paces north, five paces south, between the tall wrought-iron grating at the corner and the curb. A fresh wind rose soon after midnight and came down the Avenue with all the imps of March whistling and whining in its wake. There was a flurry of snow and for a moment a whirling as of thousands of moths around the arc-lights. A night watchman inquired gruffly what he was waiting for.

Tom told him frankly. "A young fellow's calling on my girl," he said.

Quick as a flash, the man clapped his hands over every pocket, front and rear, where a handsome society man, jealous of a rival, might possibly hide a weapon. The speed of the operation was extraordinary.

Tom laughed softly. "Fooled again, old man," he remarked.

"Show me your hands!"

Tom did so.

"Thought you might be out for a shoot-up," said the watchman, almost genially.

"I might, if it would do any good," answered Tom Paraway. "But it wouldn't.

"No. It don't do any good to get mixed up with the law. A lot of young fellows like you think they can put it over, and once or twice, if they're lucky, maybe they can. But sooner or later they get it, and up they go. Not bad fellows either."

"I wasn't thinking of the police," said Tom, with eyes still fixed on the Collingwood stoop, "when I said it wouldn't do any good; I was thinking of the girl."

"That's right," remarked the watchman thoughtfully. "You can't get a girl by any knock-out game, not if she's worth getting." He paused a moment, looking skyward and rubbing his chin. He was a keen-faced man of the mechanic type, beardless and wiry. "I buried my wife three months ago," he continued in matter of fact tones. "She was a good girl. We was married nineteen years. Ran away when we were fifteen and sixteen. What do ye know about that? I'm a draughtsman by profession. Only took up this job after my wife died, 'cause I was lonely and I didn't want to get running with the boys. I won't stick at this work forever. I'm thinking of getting married again. My wife's kid sister. Say! Courting her's no Sunday afternoon picnic, let me tell you. My brain just gets tired out talking back to her and arguing with her why being married is better than being single, and why a good time isn't the whole o' life, nor independence neither. She reads everything you ever saw, and what she don't know isn't worth talkin' about. I like it. It's not good for a man to marry a little me-too. The trouble is she knows a bit about pretty near everything and nothing thorough. That's not her fault either. But it makes her spin on her ear about things like socialism, an' religion, an' birth control — What do ye know about that? — an' politics. Now I'm a strict organization man myself — Tammany, y' understand — I be-

lieve in it. I know the papers say Tammany's corrupt, an' all that, but the papers are all for the rich fellers, an' Tammany plays square by the poor man pretty nearly always. But, d' ye know, she wouldn't talk to me for a week because I refused to knife the ticket at the last election. She was all wrong, but I respected her for it. A woman like that's a proposition to court, but once she's married she gets over the funny business, and say! spunk before marriage makes a good home afterwards. Take that from me."

"How many has your girl got on the string?" asked Tom Paraway, without turning.

The man laughed softly. "Four or five. She keeps 'em all going at the same time, like the juggler in the circus. Some juggling, too, believe me. It gets the other fellows sore, though they don't dare say so to her for fear of getting the go-by. I don't blame her. She knows a lot about life that her mother didn't know at her age, and she's doing a pile of thinking. I shouldn't wonder now if she shook the lot of us an' took to school-teaching. She likes children. She'd make a fine mother. An' yet, as I say, she may decide to teach. I wouldn't blame her. But I wouldn't marry anybody else. I'd wait for her to change her mind. A girl like that's worth waiting for."

Tom was still watching the Collingwood stoop. "You're dead right, old man," he said. "I wish you luck."

"Thanks," said the watchman. "Same to you."

"Thanks."

"Well, I've got to get on the job."

"Tell your girl from me that she'll have to give in sooner or later, so she might as well give in now."

The watchman chuckled. "I've told her that long ago. She said, 'Don't you make the mistake of expecting me to act according to any rules you get from books, then you won't be disappointed.'"

"Some girl!" said Tom.

"Believe me!" said the watchman. "Good night!"

"Good night!"

The watchman disappeared around the corner and strode up the Avenue to Fifty-eighth Street. Tom looked at his watch. Twenty minutes gone. He took to pacing to and fro across the curb again, conscious that the depression which had previously possessed him had vanished, leaving in its place something curiously like elation. The adage that Misery loves Company did not seem to him to explain this entirely. The philosophic watchman with his parallel experience somehow converted the picayune little personal difficulty of a certain Tom Paraway into a social problem, dignifying thereby not only Barbara but Tom himself. It struck him suddenly that he was dealing, not with a flirt, but with an age; that in this delicate bit of fluff and feathers the ignorance and stupidity and short-sightedness and dependence of centuries past were battling, like armies in a fog, with the vague, enormous, still unformed aspirations of the centuries to come. That discovery seemed to make a good deal of a heroine of Barbara.

Another twenty minutes passed. Tom Paraway saw a black form suddenly appear at the top of a stoop half way down the block.

"I wonder what yarn he'll spin," said Tom to himself.

The figure descended the steps slowly and turned toward Fifth Avenue. But after a half dozen strides it stopped abruptly, turned about face and moved swiftly westward. It occurred to Tom that the reason for this was that a certain patient rival had proved a recognizable silhouette against the brightness of the Avenue, and Cleve Winsor had decided that it would probably take a stronger yarn than he could spin to impress Tom Paraway. Tom stood a minute thoughtfully gazing down the sidewalk toward Sixth Avenue.

At the Plaza cabstand, as luck would have it, he ran square into Young Lochinvar, about to enter a taxi. A pitiless arc-light revealed the fact that Cleve Winsor would have preferred not to meet Tom Paraway at that moment.

"You didn't wait, I hope?" he remarked, after the first moment of confusion.

"You asked me to," said Tom quietly, feeling on the whole that he was having his revenge.

"Mrs. Collingwood begged me to stay for a bite. You know the way these mothers have. Sometimes you can't in decency refuse."

Tom looked at him, wondering whether Cleve Winsor were really as big a fool as he pretended to be, or whether his flimsy excuses were merely the light veil he threw over his contempt for other people's opinion.

Winsor lighted a cigarette and opened the taxi door. "Come along," he said. "I'm an innocent stranger in the wicked city, and I want to see all the cabarets on Broadway before I go to bed. I only come to town for three days in the year, but I take those three days strong. That's the only way I can stand Minnesota the rest of the time."

Tom Paraway told himself that he'd see himself damned first. But before he could speak, Winsor's hand was on his arm and Winsor was saying, in a pleasant, pleading voice, "Come along. You're the first man I've met in New York that I ever wanted to talk to twice. And there's a lot of things I want to talk to you about. Be a sport."

Tom wondered what under the sun Cleve Winsor had to discourse upon, gave the whole matter a sober second thought, and decided to accompany the innocent stranger to the river of the white lights.

V

"GRAND place, isn't it?" cried Cleve Winsor, evidently thrilled to the depths of him, as the taxi, failing, through no fault of the driver, to annihilate the clerky looking person who was escorting two loud young ladies across Forty-sixth Street, turned the corner and shot honking into the dazzle and glare of Broadway. His eyes fairly gleamed. There was no questioning his repressed excitement. A sober-minded New Yorker, given access to the disorderly engine and switchroom behind Cleve Winsor's impassive forehead — called, for convenience, his mind — would have been amazed to see how drunk the very spectacle of Broadway could make the engineer who presided over it; even a gay New Yorker with all his confidence that Broadway was the last word, would have been puzzled by the stir his preserve of flamboyance and gayety could make on this evidently sophisticated young man.

There was the possibility, of course, that Cleve Winsor was not quite as sophisticated as he liked to appear; not quite so much at home in the world.

But the real reason was that in the rather gay set in Minnesota, of which Cleve Winsor was king-pin, Broadway was the heaven they yearned for, and the god of Broadway the deity whose image they strove to be. To Easterners they bragged about the real America which began at Chicago, and called New York effete and foreign and degenerate, but in the secrecy of their souls they longed for the authentic glare, of which their own gayety was only the mildest of reflections.

All of which is to explain the gleam in Cleve Winsor's

eyes as the taxi stopped with a jerk before Hadden's, the famous, and he and Tom Paraway descended to the curb. There was a crowd on the sidewalk, flowing in two streams, north and south. Winsor paid the driver and shouldered his way to the restaurant door, followed by his somewhat less aggressive companion. His face expressed nothing, but under the surface he was exulting in the jostling of the crowd, the tawdry dazzle of the signs, the enormous walls, the clanging, the motor-horns, the jabber. Tom Paraway watched him, caught the gleam in the eyes once more, and was amused, rather liking the man for being less bored than he pretended.

They secured a table near the little stage, flanked by columns of purple and gold and carpeted in scarlet, which was supposed to exhibit the Most Startling yet Refined Vaudeville in the city. The room was oppressively gorgeous. There was gold everywhere. There was gold in the ceiling and gold on the hangings and gold on the black pilasters, which chopped the wall into mirrored panels but upheld nothing except the reputation of the proprietor for reckless splendor.

Mrs. Collingwood's husband, who had had a philosophic turn to his mind, had once been heard to remark that he attributed the passing of the belief in heaven as a place of marble halls and golden stairs, and other features of architectural magnificence, largely to the appearance of all these glories on Broadway. Here they were, undeniably, snuffing out imagination's last candle. The imaginative soul would have to think of a different kind of heaven; meanwhile to Pappenheimer of New York and to Smith of Kansas, this earthly paradise had charms.

This was very evident, for the place was crowded, packed. Only the slim waiters could slip between the tables, and a single portly guest would hopelessly block traffic. The room was large and the mirrors appeared to stretch it infinitely in all directions, so that it seemed

a limitless field of splashed colors peppered with black and white dress suits. And everybody was eating and drinking.

Tom Paraway, crowded against the back of a corpulent Pappenheimer, stared at the card the waiter thrust under his nose, suddenly disgusted by the crowd and the heat and the perspiring waiters and the scent of perfume and food. He decided that oysters would slip with the least effort. Cleve Winsor remonstrated, and, when Tom proved obdurate, ordered the most expensive entree on the bill for himself. The expenditure of much cash was for some reason the first essential of a spree. They began with cocktails and went on with champagne. Tom, wise in his day and generation, sipping, as he mentally consigned the headache he saw impending to Winsor.

They listened without enthusiasm to a solo or two from an angular soprano, and then attempted to talk. But conversation came hard, and for a while dealt with commonplaces and the acquaintance or two that every man from Pekin has in common with any man from Cork. For the moment, Winsor evidently preferred silence and the opportunity of studying his neighbors.

These were varied. The old and the young were there, the fat and the lean, the ugly and the beautiful, the vulgar and the elect, East Side and West Side; thrown together in this gilded pot by the insatiable hunger for anything that was expensive. There were ladies evidently from the streets here, and in a class higher, ladies from apartments mysteriously subsidized; accompanied by heavy-faced, gross men and sallow-faced, "smart men," by Jews and newly rich Gentiles, all very gallant and entertaining. There were stout women in high neck dresses with husbands, slightly distrait, evidently tourists; parties of two and parties of ten, eating and drinking and jabbering; with here and there a group of sweet-faced debutantes, attended by swains from Yale or Harvard or Princeton,

and chaperoned by some motherly person, beautifully gowned in gray foulards and seemingly unconscious of any incongruity in the presence in that place of herself or her charges.

"What do you make of Mrs. Collingwood?" asked Cleve Winsor suddenly.

Tom swung his mind from Hadden's to Mrs. Collingwood with an effort. The arc was considerable. "In what connection?" he asked.

"Well, in connection with Barbara. I can't make her out at all. She disapproves of me. I can see that. But she doesn't seem to make any bones about leaving us alone together." He spoke the words almost resentfully.

It was possible that the scene in the pantry had left in Winsor's conscience a bit of a twinge. It was a rather underfed, but at times active, conscience, and it pricked him a little now. He suspected that Mrs. Collingwood had mentally put him on his honor by leaving him alone with Barbara, and acknowledged to himself that his impetuous love-making had not under the circumstances been exactly knightly.

"I guess," said Tom with deliberation, "that she trusts Barbara to take care of herself."

"I suppose so," Cleve Winsor remarked meditatively, adding suddenly, "But Barbara can't, you know. No girl can."

This point of view struck Tom as unusual in the latitude of New York, and he said so.

"That's true enough," answered Winsor quickly. "You New Yorkers sentimentalize girls. You don't see enough of 'em. Only at dinners and dances, when they're on parade. Or playing golf, which, in its way, is the same thing. You never see the real girl. Take any intelligent farmer-boy from up the state — I don't mean a skirt-chaser, but a good square fellow with a brain — and

I'll bet that he can tell you city people a hundred things you don't know about women."

"You don't believe in the sweet innocence of the countryside, I take it," said Tom.

"No, I don't. I know it too well. I was brought up there. But that isn't the point I'm driving at. It's this. You pretend that your girls are little tin goddesses, and let 'em go ahead as though they had the wisdom of all experience by instinct. They haven't. Nine-tenths of this talk of intuition is perfect bunk. Intuition is just sex instinct, and it's as likely to lead 'em wrong as right, as far as happiness is concerned. You wouldn't trust a boy of eighteen or twenty with, say, an average manicurist, would you? But the average fellow of twenty-four or five is no better and no worse — not thoroughly bad at all, just easy-going. But you tell your girls that they're divinely able to take care of themselves, and that men are putty in their hands, and all they have to do is go ahead and show what they can do. That isn't fair to the girls. Most of the talk about the friendly and harmless relations of the sexes in America is nonsense. When boys and girls get together, they spoon, just as they do anywhere else. And unless somebody with sense interferes they'll take their sex instinct for love and get married — or not. And as a rule nobody does interfere. Girls are supposed to know what they are doing; and ninety-nine times out of a hundred they haven't the remotest idea about it. That's why the modern mother seems to me criminally negligent."

Tom Paraway received this lecture with an oyster poised in mid-air. At the close of it, he swallowed the oyster, and thoughtfuly sipped his champagne before he answered. "There are mothers and mothers, of course," he said. "And some of those who let their daughters go ahead and fight their own battles are not as lazy or blind,

or plain, stupidly optimistic as possibly the majority may be. Mrs. Collingwood isn't lazy or happy-go-lucky. She knows Barbara pretty thoroughly, and she doesn't overrate her wisdom at all. In fact, I don't think she gives Barbara credit for the real horse sense she has. She worries more than is necessary. I agree with you absolutely as far as most of the girls are concerned. But Barbara really happens to be one of those who *can* take care of themselves."

Cleve Winsor chuckled softly. "There you go," he said. "You're as bad as the rest of them. You're all hypped. You can't see straight."

Tom smiled, mainly because he felt like hitting the man, and did not think that Hadden's was the place to do it. "You see," he said slowly, "I happen to have known Barbara a little longer than you. You've known her a month now, more or less, and I've known her twenty years, more or less. I've been told that I met her the day after she was born. I've seen considerable of her since."

"Oh!" said Cleve, somewhat lamely, telling himself that he had made a discovery of importance. A silence that promised to be disastrous to what remained of their supper-party was ended skilfully by Tom Paraway's matter-of-fact return to the original theme of the conversation.

"Mrs. Collingwood isn't happy-go-lucky at all in her attitude toward Barbara," he said. "She lets her go ahead, learning her lessons in her own way, but she doesn't sit back, any more than she autocratically directs. She talks things over with Barbara all the time, whether Barbara likes it or not. Barbara generally doesn't like it, and the discussions end in trouble more than half the time. But anyway, Barbara is kept on her mettle. This has been going on ever since she came back from boarding school, two years ago. I'd trust her anywhere."

He said this, gazing with quiet deliberation straight into Cleve Winsor's face. There was the suggestion of an

upward turn at the corners of his mouth; his whole expression was friendly. Winsor resented its quiet confidence. It said, clear as words, "Go ahead, old man. I'm not afraid of you." He thought of the scene in the pantry and it seemed to him that Tom Paraway was a babe in arms compared to himself. He drank his champagne slowly for the excuse it gave him to study the face across the table. It was a compact sort of face in the sense that a surgeon's first aid kit is compact — everything necessary was there in right proportion, no feature encroaching on the domain of any other, everything solid and clean and ready for emergencies. It was a boy's face as Cleve Winsor's was emphatically the face of a grown man, hardened prematurely by wide rather than deep experience.

"You don't know very much, do you?" said Winsor familiarly, with a patronizing smile.

Paraway picked up a cracker about the size of a twenty-five cent piece, and ate it leisurely. Winsor's face was beginning to look flushed. Young Lochinvar was evidently a one-bottle man.

"No," Tom admitted, and again the corners of his mouth took the upward turn. "Not very much."

"I mean about women."

"Exactly. I've admitted it."

Cleve Winsor was a man not only of one bottle, but of one idea, and that idea, the malicious might add, was not his. But he made no pretensions to copyright on it, passing it along without thought of royalties whenever the opportunity offered. He liked to talk about sex and he talked about it to old and young, male and female, greatly embarrassing girls and middle-aged spinsters, and irritating beyond expression all who really knew something about the subject. Sex was his one topic of conversation. When that failed, all was over. He had a brother who was in college at the same time who talked of nothing except Hygiene; but, fortunately, Herbert is not in this

story, for if he were there would be no room for any one else.

"There's an awful lot of nonsense talked about women," Winsor remarked casually.

A pair of dancers, doing their turn with arresting grace, checked the incipient discourse.

"Say!" he cried excitedly, half turning over the back of his chair to get a better view, "I bet they get five hundred a night for that. Some town, eh, what?"

The dancers finished their trick and disappeared. Winsor, with gleaming eyes, faced his plate again and renewed acquaintance with the champagne. "As I was saying, there's an awful lot of nonsense talked about women," he resumed, leaning across the table. "And the foolishest nonsense of all is the nonsense about their being mysterious and complex."

He paused impressively, then proceeded as though fully conscious of the originality and importance of what he was about to pronounce. "They're not. They're simple. Man is complex. That's why he can't understand women. Sex with him is only one feature in a three-ring circus. But with women it's the whole show. They are so terribly simple and direct that a man is stumped by them, expecting to find them as complicated as he is himself, and not knowing what to make of their simplicity. Everything in their character and experience they focus on one point — the satisfaction of the sex instinct."

"Come off!" said Tom, good-humoredly.

"I told you you didn't know very much," Winsor retorted. "Not about women. I do. I began to study woman when I was fifteen, and I've studied her ever since. Woman was practically the one subject I did study at New Haven. That's why I was dropped the end of Sophomore year. They don't count it for a degree. But sex is the beginning and the end. Take my word for that."

"It may be, you know," said Tom with the smile still

hovering about the corners of his mouth, "that your acquaintance, though wide, may have been limited to a certain type, of whom all you say is probably true."

"Not a bit of it!" cried the other, a little louder than was necessary. "You mean street-walkers, don't you? I don't. I keep away from street-walkers. I mean society women and society girls, brainy women, respectable married women and girls like — well, like the girls at the party to-night."

Winsor's voice was consciously brutal. Tom saw that the man was proud of his brutal directness, and decided that Cleve Winsor was more fool than knave. But his own smile faded as he regarded the flushed, arrogant face, silently with unwinking eyes, until Winsor, suddenly discomfited, picked up his champagne glass again and drained it.

"You're mixed," said Tom at last. "It isn't sex that bothers — those girls you mentioned. That is, it doesn't bother them any more than it bothers men, if as much — which I doubt. It's one ring in their three-ring circus. What makes it appear more important is the fact that, since the beginning of things men have tried to make women believe that their only excuse for existence was their ability to decorate a harem or run a nursery. Women just had to marry, that was all there was to it. From every direction woman was pushed toward marriage. That was supposed to be her one possible job. Spinsterhood was made as unattractive and as disgraceful as possible. Naturally, girls thought that they had to get out and corral a husband first thing. Conditions have changed a bit during the last generation or two, but not much. Tradition dies hard and ninety-nine girls out of a hundred still think that the most important thing for them to do is to get married before they're twenty-five. But the new ideas that are in the air are blowing their way, and for a girl with brains they complicate the situation like the devil."

"You're a poet and a scholar," remarked Cleve Winsor, once more raising his glass. "Here's how!" He emptied his glass slowly, and leaning over, drew the bottle from its icy bucket and poured out what remained of the champagne, to the last drop. Tom let him have it all, feeling slightly guilty at leaving so much to Winsor who evidently had more than he could safely carry as it was; yet afraid, if he accepted any, that Winsor would order another bottle, which would probably prove calamitous.

"You're a poet and a scholar," Winsor repeated with deliberation. "But as I re-remarked before, you don't know much about women."

"Right you are!" said Tom. "Nobody does. Or about men either. We're all of us hopelessly complex. And there's no one key that'll open more than one lock, and you're lucky if it will open that."

Cleve Winsor reached out his hand across the table. "I like you," he said.

Tom took the hand and shook it, feeling foolish and self-conscious and wondering how he was going to lie himself out of the situation. But the whole thing was so absurd, with Cleve Winsor's flushed face positively ardent, not half a yard from his, that he suddenly found himself telling the truth. "I'm hanged if I like you," he said. "Frankly, I don't."

Tom Paraway did not enjoy hurting people's feelings and his expression, with its mingling of protest and regret, struck Cleve Winsor as so deliciously humorous that he upset his champagne glass in his endeavor adequately to slam the table, and sent it crashing to the floor. At the neighboring tables, guests turned in their chairs, some grinning, some with lifted brows. Tom saw the head waiter thread his course through the labyrinth, asked for the check and paid it, Cleve Winsor being too busy gathering his wits to notice.

The crowd on Broadway had thinned, the time being

one-thirty in the morning. Cleve Winsor stood still outside the door of Hadden's, balanced himself — adequately, on the whole — and raised his hat to let the night air blow about his forehead. "Now whereto next?" he asked, a little thickly.

"My guess is bed," said Tom.

Winsor would not hear of bed. "I want to see some dancing," he said petulantly. "Some of those — castles where you have to knock three-three-thrice — at the back door — the postern gate — the family entrance — before the gadzooks — varlets — will let down the — drawbridge — and bid you — approach. You're a gentleman. You ought to know a place like that. Come on now. Be a good fellow. Be a — be a — be a sport."

Tom confessed complete ignorance of the ways that are dark. "Bed's the place for you, old man," he concluded. "Better let me tuck you in."

Once more Winsor raised his hat, breathing deeply once or twice. "Bed — bed's the place," he assented, swaying slightly.

Tom took his arm without ostentation. "Where are you staying?"

Winsor considered a moment. "St. James!" he cried suddenly, with absurd exultation at this feat of memory. "Father's — favorite — hostelry."

A vision of shaded lamps and soft carpets and pervasive respectability invaded by the unsteady figure of Cleve Winsor flashed through Tom Paraway's mind. "Better dodge the St. James to-night," he advised. "I've got an extra bed at home."

"Extra bed!" whispered Cleve Winsor mysteriously.

They took a taxi to the house on Riverside Drive, and climbed three flights to the floor that was Tom Paraway's own. Winsor sat down on a couch, with a cigarette in one hand and a lighted match in the other, and was asleep before he could bring the two together. Tom put out the

match before it had burned more than a small hole in his best rug; and with care and dispatch undressed Cleve Winsor and led him to his own bed.

He himself did not go to sleep for some hours. The world did not look any the rosier for Winsor's sleepy remark, as his head sank into the pillow, " Kissed Barbara in the pantry to-night. An' she liked it."

VI

NEW YORK is a terrible place during the quiet hours between the putting out of the lights and the rattling of the first milk wagon. All cities are terrible during those hours, but in New York the fierceness of the bustle of daytime seems to make more poignant than elsewhere the prodigious silence of the night. A great English poet stood on London Bridge once upon a time looking at the city and marveling how all that mighty heart was lying still. But the heart never is lying still. Outwardly all is respectable and quiet, with the watchman on guard and every house-light snapped off as it should be: but behind the walls are conflict and agony and terror and remorse, and the watchman never guesses, and learns nothing even from the occasional, flashing revelation of a headline in the morning paper.

Barbara's locking of her bedroom door did not mean that she had shut out the perplexing world and was going to bed and to sleep. It meant that she had a problem to solve and wanted to be alone to solve it in her own way, unconfused and unharried by her mother. She stood an instant inside the closed door, catching her breath as she steadied herself with her hand on the knob; then she turned on the light, crossed calmly to her dressing-table and unfastened the pearls at her neck. She had no maid. Her mother might have afforded one, but decided that if Barbara desired the gay life of a New York season or two, Barbara, for the good of her soul, had better work for it, a wise conclusion, accepted by the young lady with silent but scornful resentment.

She slipped out of her dress like a somewhat prettified Venus from the wave, and letting down her hair deposited such portions of it which had originated in other scalps than hers on the celluloid tray before the mirror, and dreamily loosened and fluffed up the none too generous mass that was her own. It was not extraordinary hair at all, but there was life in it, a willingness to curl and wave and glint, golden, in the light. She raised it on her fingers, watching in the glass the youthful sheen of it, and not altogether displeased.

She was a piquant, attractive little person even by herself with no grandstand to delight, unquestionably pretty, and without doubt very expensive to keep. A cynic, who had been bitten, might have said that she was a show animal, finely marked and up to standard, an excellent pet for a millionaire, but a poor man's ticket to perdition, granted the possibility of a poor man's winning her, which was highly improbable; a pretty bit of detail for the first tier at the Metropolitan, but in no way startling as a beauty, and useless as a producer; on the whole, an irritation to the spirit and a valid excuse for bombs. All this not only our cynic, but even a stranger, seeing Barbara for the first time, might reasonably assert. But he would be thoroughly off the track, disregarding the spirit that happened to be under the fluffy prettiness.

She kept this spirit well hidden. She had a notion that the things which an elder generation used to call "noble" were vulgar, unfashionable. Virtue was well enough if you did not have wealth; but having wealth, virtue must be kept, like the scrubwoman, out of sight; wealth bearing with it the paramount obligation of being fashionable. To use wealth for other purposes was ostentatious or eccentric.

Barbara would have suffered torture rather than admit that she had desires now and then not altogether in harmony with the point of view of the society in which she

seemed so absolutely to delight; to confess, for instance, that she had an absurd notion in the bottom of her heart somewhere that she wanted to live a useful life of large dimensions, happy, if possible, but surely wide and generous. She did her best to kill off that notion, but it seemed to have strange vitality; playing dead for months at a time and then suddenly lifting its head and speaking some saving word at the eleventh hour. She scorned it and scorned what she considered the weakness in herself that allowed her to yield to this jack-in-the-grave relic of sixteen. It was the most tenacious and last of the girlhood aspirations to which her starved spirit seemed, in spite of her, to cling. A wonderful old lady had implanted it one summer six or seven years ago. That lady was the elder Mrs. Collingwood, her father's mother. She was a gentle little woman of firm convictions, and the lecture she had seen fit to deliver at the end of Barbara's first year at boarding-school three years previous had definitely severed the last attenuated strands of the relation between them which had once been so firm and close. Barbara had not seen her grandmother since.

Barbara undressed quickly; then, in her nightgown, she busied herself about the room, stowing her dress away in its paper-muslin bag, and then aimlessly wandering about with the thing in her hands, forgetting that she had intended to hang it up in the closet. The truth was that, though she had fled to her room to think undisturbed, she was mortally afraid of the rough seas she saw awaiting the launching of her thoughts.

She heard her mother moving about in the adjoining room; once she heard a slight click of the knob of the door communicating directly between Mrs. Collingwood's room and hers, as though a hand had been laid tentatively upon it.

Barbara's answer was the snapping off of the electric light switch.

The door was unlocked, but Mrs. Collingwood did not take advantage of this, evidently considering patience the better part of devotion.

Barbara heard the various clocks in the house strike one and then two and then three. The clocks, not having a master, were all either slow or fast — for the talents even of rarely efficient women seem curiously to fail in the presence of clocks and fountain pens — and one or another, therefore, was striking every quarter hour or so. Barbara was grateful for the friendly music which seemed to pull her tossing thoughts home to their moorings for an instant before they sailed forth on other turbulent cruises.

She concentrated her attention mainly on Cleve Winsor. The situation had cleared to this extent — Tom Paraway, as well as Chester Howell, was definitely eliminated. Both had suddenly slipped into the background. Why, or at what moment, she herself could not tell; but neither was any longer a person to be considered as a marriageable possibility. Chester was too inconsequent, Tom too constantly irritating. They were out of the running. That at least was settled. Henceforth they could be considered only as foils for the true hero of the play who was Cleve Winsor. The question now was not, Which of the Three? but Cleve Winsor or Nobody-at-all?

The possibility of Nobody-at-all was a new element in Barbara's meditations. It had taken shape half-consciously in her reaction against Cleve Winsor's too passionate love-making, and had gradually assumed menacing proportions. What an elder generation would have called her "maidenly modesty" had received a shock. One somehow did not associate "maidenly modesty" with Barbara or her friends, with the exception of Ruth Torrey. The cut of their frocks, the paint, the walk, the evident wish to be stared at, the careless abandon as they danced the dances that only the wickedest of tourists used to see,

surreptitiously, in Naples or Rio — all these things seemed to indicate that, whatever qualities this generation might possess, "maidenly modesty" was not one of them. But it was there, nevertheless, clutching at the heart as in the days when their great-grandmothers danced with Lafayette.

In the light of the pantry experience, Nobody-at-all seemed to Barbara the attractive way out of her dilemma. She had been kissed before, of course. A dozen boys had kissed her, claiming that privilege as reward for arduous and expensive attentions at Sixth Form Dances and college proms; but those kisses had been very different from Cleve Winsor's in the pantry — most respectful, all of them, cordial rather than affectionate, eagerly given, graciously received,—"ever so much obliged"—"you're welcome"—"good-by."

But Cleve Winsor's kisses had swung back the Enormous Gates suddenly, without warning. There before her eyes was the Garden of Love. The colors dazzled, the perfume sickened her. Something in her seemed to recoil and cry, "I will have none of it." She felt as though some glory, cherished surpassingly, was slipping from her.

And yet — coolly considered — here she was at the end of her second season, ready on the whole to relinquish the social game, immensely curious to know what marriage was like, destined by all the rules of the game to an early (and stylish) wedding, and mortally in love with the handsomest thing she had ever seen. He was incidentally rich, which was as it should be. It would be utterly silly not to marry him.

"Ah!" said Maidenly Modesty, "but what of that queer feeling you had in the pantry? For the flash of a second was it love or was it loathing that you felt?"

Barbara decided after some meditation that it was not loathing but rather fright, the newness of it all, the sudden opening of womanhood. Of course, she would marry

Cleve Winsor. She wanted him, heart and soul. Why not, why not? Suddenly nausea overcame her. She felt unspeakably ill.

"Mother!" she called weakly.

Mrs. Collingwood, in an embroidered kimono, and seeking solace from the father of Solomon the Wise, was waiting for the call, knowing that sooner or later, for some reason or other it would come. Barbara did not look at her or speak to her, but stared at the ceiling, trying to see beyond the disgusting consciousness of the body in rebellion, some vision of the life that awaited a girl of twenty-one who had decided it must be Nobody-at-all.

It may have been Ali Baba's lobster Newburgh, but whatever it was, the members of Mrs. Collingwood's party, with the exception of Cleve Winsor, who was unwakeable, did not slumber soundly that night. They were all, it seems, thinking of Barbara, and all mapping out plans of campaign involving the whole course of Barbara's future — Ruth, in all tenderness, Delia, with a touch of malice.

Chester Howell slept, but his dreams were wild. He dreamt that he was a Turk with a seraglio and three beautiful damsels, who without warning leaped up from their cushions and became avenging furies pursuing him over precipices and torrents. It was not the kind of dream one would choose after an active day. But it was not altogether irrelevant to Chester Howell's experience, for his thoughts, awake and asleep, had for weeks been filled by the tormenting fact that on a certain evening a month ago he had, in quick succession, declared his passionate devotion to two marriageable young ladies, neither of whom was the girl he was really in love with.

VII

TOM PARAWAY'S day, as previously noted, began promptly at seven, and at seven on the morning following Mrs. Collingwood's theater-party, an alarm-clock, somewhere in his brain, sounded, and he leapt up, not with alacrity, for he was fully conscious of the fact that he had had a miserable night, but with that grim determination with which a man will get up in spite of weariness when he has a schedule.

On the whole, Tom's schedule was elastic. His rising hour was the only rigid thing about it. Tacitly, his father and mother insisted on Seven. They said nothing about it, but breakfast was at Eight, and any one with the rudiments of arithmetic within could make his own calculations — so many minutes for bathing and shaving, so many for exercise, so many for Marcus Aurelius or H. G. Wells; the arrangement was perfect. Tom's mother, admiring Tom hugely and Barbara not at all, wondered with a puzzled brow and whimsical smile, not altogether mirthful, what would happen to the schedule in case it ever came into intimate contact with a certain hard little being, so indulgent of herself, so exacting of others.

Tom heard a splashing and gasping in the bath room adjoining and for an instant wondered why his father should be using his shower instead of his own. A glance into his bedroom recalled to his mind the subject of his pre-slumber meditations. The bed was touselled, but there was no Cleve Winsor in it. That gentleman evidently had strong recuperative powers. Tom began his exercises in chest development with his mind elsewhere.

A minute or two later, Cleve Winsor appeared, with a bath towel draped loosely about him. He bore surprisingly few marks of his insobriety of the previous night. His eyes were a bit dull, but they were never bright; the curious bronze gleam of them was there as usual. His skin was gray and the unevenness of the cheeks showed more distinctly in the fresh light of morning. But his appearance was otherwise respectable enough.

"Howdy," he said, reaching out his hand.

Tom Paraway took it. "Didn't expect you out as early as this," he said.

"I suppose I made a fool of myself last night," Winsor remarked, picking up, as it happened, the very cigarette he had let fall five hours before. "I do — once in so often." He yawned. "It's a family failing. My dad is one of the biggest lumbermen in Minnesota, but every once in so often he has to go off and get tight as a tick. The wonderful thing is he can sleep off the worst drunk in one night and get back to business fresh as a daisy next morning. He's famous for it all over the State, and they talk about it in the camps. I seem to be the same way. I suppose it's a sort of gift."

He laughed deprecatingly, and lit the cigarette. "It's a dangerous accomplishment, of course," he went on. "It lets you forget too fast. For the good of my soul, I ought to have a hang-over this morning, but I haven't — not even a headache. But I'm damn sorry if I made a nuisance of myself." He spoke the apology easily, and it took no diviner to see that the regret was not profound.

Tom assured him that he had been no great care.

"The trouble with me," remarked the other after a pause, "is that at bottom I'm a lumberjack. I have a way of forgetting that — when I get dolled up for parties and hang around town for a month or two. It isn't that I get soused. Everybody gets soused sometime or other. But I get soused at the wrong time. I had no business

to get drunk last night, and to let you see me half under. For all I knew, you might have been the snide kind who would report me to the lady —"

He said this with unnecessary deliberation, Tom thought.

"But, of course," Winsor proceeded quickly, "you're not. So that's all right. I had luck, that was all. I might just as well have gone off with that young skyrocket, Chester Something-or-other, and been dished with Mrs. Collingwood for keeps. And I don't believe in getting in bad with the mothers. You're square. I can see that. In fact you've been damn decent. And I want to do the decent thing by you."

"Go ahead!" said Tom cheerfully. A more sensitive soul than Cleve Winsor might have noticed a lack of respect in the tone, but Cleve was not one to distinguish subtle shadings. Tom took to the shower. He suspected that Cleve was about to pour out his heart, and hoped, if possible, to prevent it.

But Cleve was not to be staved off. He followed Tom to the bath room and leaned against the door frame while Tom proceeded with his ablutions. Tom did not like to have strangers present at this morning ceremony, and splashed more wildly than usual under the cold water in the hope of driving the observer back into the sitting-room. But Cleve, girded in a towel, lighted a second cigarette, from the stump of the first, cast this stump lightly into the wash basin, and after a long and silent regard of his naked rival, began to talk. The water system of the Par-away house was a veritable steam calliope and Tom knew exactly how many turns of the faucet it took to bring out this or that prodigious note. He tried them all. But Cleve merely raised his voice, and to the accompaniment of shrieking waterpipes, through clouds of mingled cigarette-smoke and steam, confessed his love for Barbara Collingwood.

"You were damn decent to bring me up here," he called. "And I want to tell you that I appreciate it. As I said, another man would have let me get into trouble and would have told on me afterwards. Not that that would have made any difference with Barbara. A fine girl like Barbara don't believe everything she hears. But it might have made things difficult with her mother. Her mother's old-fashioned. She has a lot of trouble with her mother. She told me that, when I first met her. That was in Minneapolis a month ago. It was love at first sight — with both of us, I guess. Anyway, she said I could come East to see her, after a month, if I still felt the same."

The waterworks gave an ominous growl, followed immediately by a shrill squeak. Cleve Winsor leaned his head against the door post and puffed dreamily at his cigarette. "And last night we got engaged," he said.

The words were drowned in a fresh burst of stentorian music. "What's that?" asked Tom Paraway sharply.

"Last night Barbara and I got engaged," shouted Cleve.

Tom turned on a deep tremolo that seemed to shake the building. At the same moment he brought down his foot suddenly on a spot where he knew there was always a puddle. A wave of icy water spurted out from under his foot and drenched Young Lochinvar. He completed his bath in private.

Later, dressing together, they spoke of ordinary matters,— of submarines, munitions, the future of democracy, the position of women after the war.

At that, Cleve Winsor straightened up in front of the mirror and laid the brushes he had been using on the stump of another of his cigarettes on the dresser. "There's an awful lot of nonsense talked about women," he began. "And the foolish nonsense of all —" For the first time a terrible thought occurred to him. "My God, I can't go to breakfast in a dress-suit!" he cried. "And

I can't get into your clothes. What in the name of Satan am I going to wear? "

The situation looked dark for the moment, but Tom solved it with a Spring suit of his father's that happened to be awaiting its season in the rear of Tom's wardrobe. They descended to the dining-room to the tune of, " As I was saying, there's an awful lot of nonsense —" and so forth; but at the door of the dining-room the lecture fizzled out. Mr. and Mrs. Paraway were already at the table and gently took command of the discourse for the time being.

Cleve Winsor did not enjoy his breakfast, that is, not the beginning of it. His boast that the derangement of his equilibrium the evening before had left no effects was an habitual fiction with which he tried to persuade himself and others that he had truly inherited his father's famous gift. In this as well as in other matters the elder Winsor's genius had descended to his son in diluted form. Cleve Winsor's brain was therefore in no condition to cope with the airy, slightly ironic nonsense of Mrs. Paraway, or the more solid queries concerning lumber and the outlook for business and preparedness in the Middle West, directed at him by her husband.

For breakfast at the Paraways' was no informal scramble for cereal and coffee. It was an occasion for conversation, and the food was incidental. That was Mrs. Paraway's main contribution to Mr. Paraway's education: man is distinguishable from the other animals insofar as he has ideas and expresses them. Years ago, Mr. Paraway had protested against discussing Sainte Beuve over his oatmeal, but his protest had been quietly ignored. He lived to discuss first Oscar Wilde, then Kipling, then Maeterlinck, then Yeats, then Shaw, then Bergson, then Soralla, then " Jean Christophe," when the Great War submerged literature for the time, and the morning debate became a battledore and shuttlecock of subtle opinions, nicely

weighed, on democracy and imperialism, the future of the small nations, and so forth and so on, with occasional excursions into Imagism and *vers libre*. It was a game in which Mrs. Paraway delighted, for she was an exquisite player at it. Mr. Paraway suffered it, as many a great and good man has suffered croquet in its time, or yachting, out of courtesy or the pleasure of a graceful exhibition of skill.

Cleve Winsor was helpless from the very beginning. Indeed, it was a part of the game with Mrs. Paraway to bewilder her hearer with the spun-glass brightness of her talk and then gracefully to extricate him from the snares she herself had flung. She charmed in both rôles. Her victims always admired her, even those who found it impossible to love her because, at some time or other, they had happened to be hit and hurt by Mrs. Paraway's racket in her all-forgetting ardor for the game. But these were rare. There were not a half dozen in all.

She was already seated at the breakfast table with her husband when Tom entered with his guest, and gave Winsor her hand without rising. She had a sharply defined face, that had always been too thin to be beautiful; but was girlish and young even now, with its whimsical smile and bright eyes. There was something joyously reckless in those eyes at times — the adventurousness of a boy of sixteen.

She was an intellectual mænad, more than a little drunk with books.

Her husband, opposite her, was Tom at middle age, compact, strong, clean, a power where Tom was only a promise, inflexible, persistent, a great lawyer who under other political conditions might have been a great governor; as things were, a rich man by right of his own efforts; altogether, one of the most noteworthy men in the city, though not fifty people knew it. Both Mr. Paraway and his wife fitted admirably into their background, which

was quartered oak and ivory with one brilliant bit of blue over the fireplace, where a Monet marine sparkled and shone like a solitary sapphire on a beautiful woman's throat.

The introductions were swiftly done with. "You don't know in what suspense I have been," said Mrs. Paraway, as she motioned Cleve Winsor to the chair at her right. "I heard two sets of footsteps and two voices — evidently peaceful — and then suddenly our steam calliope, going mad. I declare, you know, that I can tell Tom's mood of a morning to a degree by the sounds our water system emits when he takes his shower. The tremolo he reserves for righteous indignation. And this morning I thought the tremolo would shake the pictures off the hooks. Now you must tell me what you were doing to my poor, defenseless boy."

Winsor flushed. "Nothing at all, Mrs. Paraway. He doesn't look damaged, does he?"

"Oh, but he does," answered Mrs. Paraway quickly. "And I have the testimony of the calliope, you know. The calliope is as near infallibility as anything mortal can reach. Who was that clever Frenchman who said that the only mysterious things left in a garish world were water-pipes and American politics. Shaw or Chesterton or George Moore might have said it, but they didn't. Who was it, don't you remember?"

"I'm sorry to say I don't," said the victim lamely, helping himself to cream of wheat.

"Don't you think the French mind is delightful?" Mrs. Paraway went on with apparently unabated enthusiasm. "It is like the body of a swift runner, lithe and wiry and intent on the goal. The English mind is too heavy; and the American mind is too thin and undeveloped either for track or field events. It needs a good trainer. Do you find time to read much, Mr. Winsor?"

Mrs. Paraway knew perfectly well that he didn't; but

it was a part of the game to make your victim squirm. Cleve Winsor did not seem to suffer at being forced to confess that he read only the papers. "We're too busy up our way for much reading," he added, allowing Mrs. Paraway to infer that in his judgment reading was a luxury for the effete, a form of self-indulgence scorned by red-blooded men.

"Ah!" cried Mrs. Paraway, like a hawk pouncing on a barnyard cock. "But don't you see that it's reading that maketh a full man and that the reason the American mind is undeveloped is because it feeds too little on the thoughts of the past? I should like to edit a weekly sometime, something I could make my patient husband endow so that I could say what I wanted, independent of advertisers, questioning all things, particularly the terms and slogans we think most unquestionable, fighting for candor and clear thinking and an end of sentimentalizing. I think a job like that might keep a woman from growing old, don't you, Mr. Winsor?"

"I am sure you don't need it for that purpose," said Cleve Winsor, happy to be on familiar ground again, and smiling benignantly.

A cloud seemed to pass over the sparkle in Mrs. Paraway's eyes. Cheap flattery was against all the rules of the game, even though you fished for it. The game for the fish was to nibble and pretend to take the hook, and then adroitly to run away with the bait. To swallow the hook was merely banal. "Won't you help yourself to the cream?" she said. "Tom has it as usual. Tom always does. If cream were whiskey, I believe Tom would not have a sober moment."

The cream was transferred and for a minute or two there was silence. At last, giving up literature as hopeless, Mrs. Paraway turned once more to Cleve Winsor, determined to test him in politics.

"I believe my son said you were from Minnesota?"

He admitted the fact.

"How interesting!" she cried, pouring his coffee. "Mr. Paraway and I were just discussing your region last night. He insists on being indignant because you don't all jump at and embrace the idea of national preparedness. But I say that you are perfectly justified. You are a nation by yourselves, an island nation like Switzerland, with your own problems and your own culture. I am going to make you judge between us."

Mr. Winsor, figuratively speaking, threw up his hands. Tom came to his rescue. "Do give the man a chance to eat his breakfast, Mother," he protested.

"But I want to know!"

"Winsor, don't you say a word," cried Tom. "Mother is a glutton of opinions. She eats 'em alive. She'll have you delivering a lecture on feminism in a minute if you don't look out." There was a malicious glint in Tom's eyes.

"Oh, are you a feminist, Mr. Winsor?" asked Mrs. Paraway, the insatiable, lifting her delicate eyebrows ever so slightly. "How interesting. I had an idea that male feminists could survive only in regions where women do *not* vote."

("My Gawd! What in blue blazes is a feminist?" cried Cleve Winsor to his soul.)

"The women do vote in Minnesota, don't they?" pursued the lady. "How does it work?"

"They don't vote, I'm glad to say," answered Lochinvar emphatically, with the implication in his voice that a ballot in the hands of Mrs. Paraway would wreck the country.

Mrs. Paraway tilted her head to one side and gave Mr. Paraway a quick glance to see whether he fully appreciated their guest's gallantry. "Oh!" she cried. "How cruel you are!" She laughed gayly, and Cleve Winsor never suspected that she was laughing at him. "But it's

all right. I am a Horrid Anti myself, a pet and a parasite. But I thought the Middle West was sentimentally gallant to a man. Deep down, I do believe, I have derived a certain amount of sentimental satisfaction from this supposition."

Cleve Winsor looked up and put on a thoughtful expression. " There's an awful lot of nonsense talked about women," he began casually.

(" Help! " cried Tom to himself.)

But there was no help. For the rest of the meal Cleve Winsor discoursed on Sex, oblivious of the gradual though evident petrifaction of the faces of his hosts. For once Mrs. Paraway's conversational art failed her. She could not switch him off. Mr. Paraway, above board the picture of polite interest, kicked Tom in the shins, unseen, a little harder than was necessary, for the crime of bringing this inconceivable bore to their breakfast-table.

Once he exchanged a puzzled glance with his wife. What was happening to Tom? was the thought in both minds. If Tom approved of Cleve Winsor — and he must approve of him, for here the man was, without excuse, at the most intimate meal of the day — something must be wrong with Tom's soul.

Cleve Winsor's discourse rolled on and on. Tom, conscious that his parents must be holding him responsible, felt hot and cold by turns. Mr. Paraway's sudden discovery that Cleve Winsor was wearing his pet Spring suit did not help to clear up the mystery.

At last the Awful Thing was over. They all rose, and Mrs. Paraway, divining that her husband might want a minute for his paper, led the orator of the day to her Woman's Shelf in the library, and revenged herself on him by discoursing without pause for twenty minutes on Ellen Key, Selma Lagerlöf, Strindberg, Havelock Ellis and Rebecca West.

VIII

TOM did not accompany his mother and their guest. The meditations of the early hours of the morning, to the accompaniment of Cleve Winsor's drunken snores, had not been without result. He had decided on a course of action. This happened to involve his father. An appealing glance from that mystified gentleman gave him the opportunity he wanted.

"Allied drive seems to be on the come," remarked Mr. Paraway, tapping the morning paper.

"It won't get far," grumbled Tom. "No Allied drive will until the English make up their minds they're in a real war. God help the Dutchmen when they do, though."

From a safe distance came the incomprehensible hum of a soft voice, discoursing in the library. Mrs. Paraway and Cleve Winsor were out of range.

A slow grin started somewhere under Mr. Paraway's mustache and slowly spread. He laid the paper back on the breakfast-table and sank again into his chair.

"Friend of yours?" he asked.

"No," said Tom, as emphatically as soft speech permitted.

Mr. Paraway chuckled at the evident feeling. "Where'd you raise him?"

"At the Collingwoods'."

"Oh! Friend of Barbara's?"

"I believe so."

"Well, well."

"What does 'well, well,' mean?"

"Mean? Why nothing in particular."

"Pardon me. I think it does."

"Why, if you want to know, it occurred to me that he would be perfectly adequate for Barbara."

"That isn't very kind to me."

"You know my feelings about that affair, my boy. It's your own business, of course. I have never interfered and I won't interfere now."

Tom sank into the chair Young Lochinvar had vacated. "You simply don't know Barbara," he said.

"All right, I'll let it go at that."

"He says they're engaged."

"Well, that would seem to settle it, wouldn't it?" The relief in Mr. Paraway's tones was evident.

"Not exactly. I think he's lying."

"Possibly."

There was a pause, then Mr. Paraway added, "By the way, would you mind telling me why you brought the young man to this house to spend the night?"

"He was — well — drunk."

"Therefore my Spring suit, I take it?"

"Yes."

"You are rather more decent than most men would be to a person who, I suppose, might be considered a rival, aren't you?"

"No. But I can't help having a certain respect for any friend of Barbara's, in spite of appearances, and a certain feeling of responsibility for any friend of hers who happened at the moment to be — a bit helpless. You know how I feel. I'd rather not go into details."

"You are very fond of Barbara, aren't you?"

"I've answered that question before."

"It is a question I shall probably continue to ask at six months' intervals."

"You will continue to get the same answer."

"Frankly, I hope to heaven she marries the tailor's dummy."

"Winsor?"

"Yes."

"She won't."

Mr. Paraway looked at his son for a moment, not without gratification. "What are you going to do about it?"

"In the first place, I'm going to ask you for indefinite leave from the office."

"That's a new departure, Tom."

"I know."

"Where do you wish to go?"

"Nowhere. I shall stay in New York."

"But what is the idea?"

"I'm going to camp on Barbara's front stoop, that's all."

"Don't you think you are a little maudlin?"

"No."

"The munitions case is up to-morrow."

"I know. It's a lot to ask, but there's a lot at stake."

"I've relied on your help."

"It's this way, Dad. It's not all for myself. Barbara's been — well — bowled over a bit by this man, Winsor. I don't think she quite knows what she's getting into. Anyway, I'm sure she thinks he's square and fine and all that. Of course he isn't. He's a good deal of a mess. Naturally, I can't tell Barbara that. If I did, she wouldn't believe me anyway. I've got to knuckle down and beat him out. I don't pretend to be so very fine myself, but I have a notion that I can make Barbara happier than the other man ever will."

"You're rather young to marry, Tom."

"I'm twenty-four."

"You ought to wait two years anyway. You should be altogether in your work these years. It's a great deal of a disappointment to me that you should even think of letting any sentiment, however fine in itself, interfere with your work at this time. You know the opportunity you have in my office. We have the reputation there of

having *made* more lawyers than any other firm in the country, which means, that when we have trained a man for ten years, he is fitted to handle pretty nearly any size proposition that may come up. Those ten years, of course, are tough years. Your mother once asked me, long ago, why, under the canopy, we tried so hard to keep people out of prison when the ideal of the office seemed to be penal servitude. It isn't, of course. Monastic devotion is nearer what we demand, and you may remember that celibacy is the monastery's second rule and obedience its first."

Mr. Paraway had pushed his chair back from the table and was sitting with hands folded and elbows on the armrests, watching his son. His voice, as well as his whole manner, was quiet and unexcited; not harsh or hard in the least; tender, rather; the voice and manner of a prior, who loves while he exhorts.

"Of course," Mr. Paraway went on, "I don't mean that the men in our office never marry. They do, as you know. But it's a tradition that they don't marry — or even think much of marrying — until after the first three or four years. They are internes, as it were, in the hospital of justice; and a fine woman would not ask a man to shirk any of the obligations of this novitiate, this almost sacred apprenticeship."

"Barbara has not asked me to shirk anything."

"Not directly, but by implication. Barbara wastes half your sleep, and, I suspect, vexes your waking hours more than you care to confess to your mother or myself. I consider her a vain, spoiled, selfish, little woman. I believe you would be very unhappy with her."

"I don't want to seem stubborn, and you know how much I respect your judgment —"

A low exclamation escaped Mr. Paraway's well-guarded lips, and fell poignantly on his son's heart. There was more pain in it than he had ever heard his father express before.

"Dad!" cried Tom softly.

Neither stirred in his chair. They were not nervous men. They sat, staring at each other through gray, expressive eyes.

"I know how you feel," said Tom at last, in a voice slightly strained. "Work seems to you the most important thing for me to attend to at the moment. You would be absolutely right under ordinary circumstances. But I cared for Barbara before I ever heard of the law. I want to marry her. But I don't think she'll have me. That's secondary anyway, for the moment. The main thing is to keep her from marrying what you call the tailor's dummy."

"My dear boy, the tailor's dummy is destiny for a girl like Barbara. If she doesn't marry him now, she'll long for him afterwards — not this particular one, possibly, but others cut like him. Woman to man, and manikin to manikin — the attraction is irresistible."

Tom released his knee suddenly. "We disagree on the fundamental point."

"I am afraid so," said the elder Paraway quietly.

There was a pause. Through it, the musical voice of Mrs. Paraway could be heard, coming from the library. Her revenge was thorough.

"I don't know how long he's going to stay," said Tom at last. "Only three days, however, I believe. I can't give him a clear field, as I would have to if I went into the munitions case. I've got to have those three days off."

"I will not pretend that the winning of the case depends on you. Of course, it does not. We shall win it in any event. Popular feeling is against us but we have the law on our side, and I am sufficiently optimistic to believe that with sound presentation that is all we shall need to win the case. You would be missed from the office, of course, but that is not the point. It seems to me that a sacred principle is involved — the dignity of a man's

work. If you were run down and wanted three months off to recuperate in Bermuda or the Rockies, I should say, God bless you, go, and get well. But this is a different matter. You want to desert the office on the eve of an important case in order to chase a butterfly." He paused, revealing the first outward sign of emotion as he unclasped his hands and began thoughtfully to drum the knuckles on his left hand with the fingers of his right. "I am afraid, my boy, that I cannot give you the leave of absence you want."

This time it was the younger Paraway who had himself in absolute control. No quaver of voice or muscle revealed the fact that years of dreams and ambitions were being marched to their execution.

"I had made up my mind before I spoke to you about it," he said. "I understand your point of view, and I would only be insulting you if I tried to make clear how much I respect it. That goes without saying. You are the biggest man I have ever known or ever expect to know. I realize perfectly that in opposing you I am cutting myself off from a career that, I suppose, was fairly assured. And I realize, too, that I am hurting you more than — than I imagined I could ever bring myself to hurt any one. But even this seems less important to me at the moment than — than chasing a butterfly, as you call it. It seems to me necessary just now that I give my undivided attention to my friendship for Barbara — to call it nothing else. I think that if Barbara were a man you would understand me better, and would agree that sometimes it may be wise to sacrifice many things to stand by a friend. As it is, you think I am just infatuated, and the whole matter looks vulgar and self-indulgent." He paused, then, on an impulse, cried softly, "I wonder if you couldn't trust me?"

"Of course, I trust you, Tom. Your judgment is sound enough, as far as you see. But you don't see far

enough. You can't. You haven't known enough women — socially or in court. I believe absolutely that marriage with Barbara would be a tragedy for you. My dear boy, quite apart from the principles involved, which would be enough to determine my position, how can I connive at what I firmly believe would be your own destruction? "

Tom stared at his father unhappily. " You persist in seeing only the froth of Barbara. You are like her mother in that respect. Barbara knows you are looking only for froth, so she blows it in your face."

Again silence, broken only by the distant music of Mrs. Paraway's avenging discourse.

" I suppose," Tom added, " I might as well resign from the office now."

Mr. Paraway clutched the arms of his chair. " My dear boy," he said, almost in a whisper. " Reconsider. Reconsider."

" I reconsidered a hundred times over between two and four this morning," said Tom. " My mind is absolutely made up."

The elder Paraway said nothing for what seemed to both a long while, then he rose and quietly spoke. " This is too bad," he said. " It will make your mother very unhappy."

Tom rose likewise. " I am afraid so."

They shook hands in silence. Then Mr. Paraway bent down, picked up the morning paper from the breakfast table and started for the library. At the door he turned.

" Will you continue to live here? "

" As you wish."

" I should prefer it."

" Very good."

Suddenly the elder took a step backward into the dining-room. " Tom? "

" Yes? "

Mr. Paraway looked into his son's eyes, searching for

some sign of relenting. But he found none. Tom never knew what he had intended to say. What he actually did say was, "Get back my Spring suit, will you, old man? Spring wouldn't be the same without it."

Tom grinned, not very successfully. They interrupted Mrs. Paraway's lecture with what appeared to be the end of a long discussion on the position of the Allies in Flanders.

IX

TEN minutes later, Tom and Winsor climbed three flights of stairs to Tom's quarters, to find a suitcase for Winsor's clothes of the evening before; and Mr. and Mrs. Paraway achieved a moment alone together in the sitting-room, one flight up. It was a beautiful room, cool in color, simple in furnishings, a miracle of taste that seemed almost instinctive, from its alabaster mantel to its airy hangings, gray or lavender or both. Almost instinctive — not quite. If art is long, this room was in the middle of the journey — far beyond the carelessly punctilious daffodils, the arts-and-crafts gewgaws, the dozen deliberate effects of the late convert to the world that is artistic. It was a pleasant protest against the commonplace and a perfect frame for Mrs. Paraway. The trouble lay in the fact that one was conscious of its function as a frame. Every one entering the room admired it, but no one ever felt that he knew the deeps of Mrs. Paraway any better for having seen it. Now and then, after a difficult day unsnarling the woes of his clients, Mr. Paraway would be irritated almost to the point of explosion by the subtle artistry of it, the unreality, the irrelevancy to the struggles of men. Once he did protest, expressing a desire for some plain vulgarity. His wife told him his nerves were unstrung; which was true enough.

Mr. Paraway opened the conference. "Mother," he remarked in matter-of-fact tones, "Tom has decided to leave the office."

Mrs. Paraway was amazed. "Oh, *dear!*" she exclaimed with an emphasis that made the mild exclamation sound almost like an oath. "Tell me. Why — under the sun?"

He told her in half a dozen sentences. A look in which sorrow, annoyance and perplexity were fused and made iridescent by her indomitable smile, crossed her features, arching her eyebrows and wrinkling her brow.

"What a nuisance!" she said.

"Nuisance," he remarked, "is conservative."

He sat down in his particular arm-chair and began drumming his knuckles. The smile faded from Mrs. Paraway's face and the perplexity only remained. She knew that Mr. Paraway's knuckles were to him what banging doors were to men of less control.

"I suppose he will marry her," remarked Mr. Paraway, looking old.

"There's many a slip."

"Not with men of Tom's caliber. That's why he's such a good lawyer. He imagines all possible slips beforehand and prevents them."

"Could you postpone the hearing of the munitions case?"

"I suppose I could. But I shall not do it. Why?"

"Tom will be a very good lawyer in a few years. You really should hold on to him. Have it postponed a week. This whole matter will be over by that time. Give him his three days off."

"I can't. It's a matter of principle."

"Who was it who said that principles are the tapping cane of the blind?"

"Whoever he was, my dear, he was a fool."

"Crushed! The clever line was my own."

But Mr. Paraway was not in a mood for clever lines. "Besides," he went on, "I can't help him get a girl I know will make him miserable."

"I think," mused Mrs. Paraway, "I think that Barbara will marry Mr. Winsor."

"Do you really?"

"I really do."

"Why?"

"He has charm."

That piece of information had a curious effect on Mr. Paraway. His eyes and mouth opened wide in amazement and incredulity. After a moment a puzzled look succeeded, as though he were trying to solve a conundrum. "Well, well, well," he murmured at last, giving it up.

Mrs. Paraway was laughing at him. "A great deal of charm," she persisted.

"I'll take your word for it."

"In fact, when he wasn't talking, I found him decidedly attractive."

"Well, well."

"He tried to flirt with me. And I declare, I do believe, if I hadn't forced myself to go on talking him to death, he would have succeeded."

Mr. Paraway was chuckling softly. "I am a babe in arms," he confessed. "I know nothing about the possibilities of the human mind."

"Have you ever heard of sex attraction?"

"I believe so," he answered, humbly. "It sounds familiar."

"Well, I should say that Barbara Collingwood's future husband has it."

"How very interesting!" he murmured, as though to himself. "How very interesting."

"I will try to keep Tom busy these next few days," Mrs. Paraway went on quietly, "though it isn't really necessary. I am quite confident that Barbara will marry Mr. Winsor."

"I leave you in charge, my dear," said Mr. Paraway, rising. "You have a head."

"How about the munitions case?"

"I have told you my decision in that matter, my dear."

"But you do want to give the boy his chance?"

"I tried to. He has chosen not to take it."

"But, David, listen. This whole foolish matter about the girl will be over in a week."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"That can make no difference in Tom's position in regard to the office. I can't imagine that he would want it to make any difference."

"You lawyers!" cried Mrs. Paraway in mock despair.

"Good-by, my dear."

"You are adamant?"

"On that matter, yes."

He kissed her and left the house hurriedly to evade Tom and the young man who had charm. Fifteen minutes later those two likewise departed. As they were going, Mrs. Paraway asked Tom to meet her at Brentano's at twelve-thirty to help her select some books for a bride-to-be, and thereafter to lunch with her at the Cosmopolitan Club. He demurred a little and begged her to excuse him. But Mrs. Paraway pleaded. His father had told her about his decision to leave the office, she said, and she felt that he owed her an opportunity to talk things over.

"Talking won't do any good, Mother, he said. "I've made up my mind and the thing is settled. Really."

"We've always been good friends, Tom," she whispered in his ear as he kissed her good-by. "But do as you think right, of course."

He did not answer.

Mrs. Paraway loved to play games. She was excellent at cards and at chess, but she enjoyed most the battledore of ideas and that more absorbing chess in which the counters live and breathe. Quite unknown to himself, Tom had for years been the principal counter in a little game of Mrs. Paraway's which one might call, "Celibacy; or, Keeping Tom Unmarried."

The three main counters were Tom, Barbara and Ruth Torrey, with Delia Kern and Chester Howell as auxiliaries.

The object of the game was, as we have indicated, keeping Tom a bachelor, and the method was to play off Ruth and Barbara against each other in such a way that he would marry neither. Whenever Barbara seemed to engage more of Tom's time than seemed to Mrs. Paraway necessary, she invited Ruth to theater-parties and made much of her; when Ruth, encouraged by this, began to deluge Tom with friendly little notes, inviting him to everything under the sun, Mrs. Paraway countered with a dinner for Barbara. The game was a little cruel. Barbara, confident of Tom's affection, enjoyed the party and thought no more of it, but Ruth, tantalized like a mouse by a cat, suffered. Delia and Chester Howell were used merely as parsley round the roast on all occasions, whoever happened to be the roast. Mrs. Paraway had a notion in the back of her head that with skillful management, one of the girls might in the fullness of time be married off to Chester Howell. As for the other, some one was bound sooner or later to appear and fall in love with her. Mrs. Paraway had great confidence in the power of intellect. Like many intellectual people, moreover, she believed firmly in luck. Cleve Winsor was sheer luck. Contrary to Mrs. Paraway's expectations, she was not at all unhappy after breakfast that morning. She felt that her nice little solitaire was going to "come out," because of the sudden, unexpected turning up of the ace of hearts.

She telephoned to Ruth and made an appointment to meet her at Brentano's at twelve forty-five. Ruth was audibly thrilled, for Mrs. Paraway was gracious as only Mrs. Paraway could be.

"I half promised Dad to dine with him," Ruth said, reluctant to decline.

"Do come," cried Mrs. Paraway. "I think Tom will be there, and it will be so jolly."

"Oh, I will! Thank you so much, Mrs. Paraway. I'm sure Dad will understand."

So far so good.

Mrs. Paraway, with her finger on the hook of the receiver, pondered for a moment, staring at a reproduction of Georgione's "Concert" that hung above the couch. Then she allowed her ardor for the game to betray her into one of those little lapses into which she had a way of tripping about once every three years. For she deliberately telephoned Mrs. Clipston, whom she herself, as far back as the Spanish War, had dubbed a "machine-gun gossip," and after a long discussion concerning certain Red Cross work in which they were both involved, incidentally remarked how very interesting it was that Barbara Collingwood was engaged to a man from Minneapolis.

"Mr. Winsor told Tom himself," she added. "Isn't it charming? I am so glad."

Having cast this crumb upon the waters, she hung up the receiver and energetically plunged into that less fascinating but no less exacting game of keeping house. She played it to a finish; whereupon she stretched herself comfortably on the couch in the sitting-room and began the game of literature with six volumes of American poetry fresh from the bookstore on the floor beside her, and the seventh in her hand. She regarded all seven with some distrust, none of them having yet been acclaimed by the London *Spectator*.

Tom, meanwhile, accompanying Cleve Winsor to the St. James, where there was to be an exchange of clothes, laid his own plans. The thing of first importance, he determined, was to stick like a leech to Young Lochinvar. That gentleman must have no opportunity of seeing Barbara. At the risk of offending his mother, Tom decided that he would not allow Cleve Winsor out of his sight. Cleve Winsor must also come to Brentano's, and also lunch at the Cosmopolitan Club.

They effected the exchange of garments successfully and sent Mr. Paraway's pet Spring suit home by special mes-

senger. It was ten o'clock by that time and Winsor remarked that he had an important engagement with a friend of his father's. Tom was suspicious, but he recognized the name and expressed his willingness to accompany Winsor to the door of the great financier's office. At the subway entrance in Columbus Circle, however, Winsor had a change of heart.

"Shoot!" he cried. "I'll go see him to-morrow."

"Good enough!" cried Tom. "That'll give me a chance to show you some of those new makes of cars I was telling you about. This is Bubble Alley here."

Winsor was obviously not enthusiastic, but nevertheless he followed Tom down Broadway. They examined three or four makes, Winsor looking at his watch at three minute intervals; Tom alert, on guard. He was quite certain that Winsor had an appointment. He was equally certain that the appointment was with Barbara. It occurred to him that it might not be impossible to kidnap Cleve Winsor.

He suggested that they try out one of the cars.

Winsor was not greatly interested, but agreed, after some urging, and climbed into the tonneau from the off side, which was unnecessary but did not strike either Tom or the chauffeur as noteworthy until a minute or so after they had started. In the middle of the Circle they became aware that the off rear tire was flat. The chauffeur swore and looked for the nail, Tom, full of sympathy, at his side. They discovered no nail. But when they started to take their seats again and to return reluctantly to the garage, they made a discovery of a different sort. Cleve Winsor had taken French leave.

They found an irate manager awaiting them. It seemed that a passerby had observed a handsome young man pushing a penknife gently into the brand new tire of a brand new car, and the action had seemed to him eccentric enough to justify his stepping into the show room and

telling the manager about it. The manager was in a condition of mind approaching apoplexy. He threatened to have Tom arrested, but finally cooled sufficiently to agree that the more profitable course would be to accept the price of the tire. This he finally did, charging twenty per cent. extra for wounded pride. Tom decided that the shoe would do for his own car and was dismayed when he found it was just enough off-size to be absolutely useless to him. He therefore sold it back to the manager at half price and departed, convinced that plotting was expensive and that as a kidnapper he was no success whatever.

The time was now eleven-thirty. Cleve Winsor was God-only-knew-where, and in an hour, Tom realized, he himself was due at Brentano's. He hunted for a telephone booth. While he had been with Winsor, his endeavor had been to keep that gentleman away from telephones, but the deprivation had been as great for him as for Winsor. In a minute he was talking to Mrs. Collingwood. Barbara had had a miserable night, it seemed, and was still in bed. "I suppose you're busy at the office?" she added.

"I've taken a few days off," he answered, as though he were in the habit of doing that sort of thing.

But Mrs. Collingwood knew him and was amazed. "You're not ill?" she asked solicitously.

He laughed. "No. I merely thought I'd trail Bee's new friend a bit. But I'm no good. He got away from me."

"Can you take lunch with me?"

"Sorry. Can't do it. Engagement with Mother."

"Where are you now?"

"Fifty-sixth Street and Broadway."

She begged him to run in for just a minute. It seemed she had something very important to tell him. Her voice was ominous. He agreed to come at once.

X

BARBARA awoke at ten in the morning, fully aware of the nature of the dramatic close of her meditations. Her body was limp, her head ached. She wanted to sleep forever. The three suitors, remembering the vivacious lady who seemed to shine in all directions at once, indomitably bright, would have been puzzled in their youthful inexperience to see her lying there, so utterly without fire, with that pathetic down-curve of her lips and that worried look in her eyes. Possibly they might have adored her all the more thus — for at her best she was disconcerting, bewildering, and there in her laces and pillows she was only piteous. She had the happy gift, moreover, of keeping her color even in misery.

She was vaguely conscious that she had been dreaming of Cleve Winsor, but the details had slipped or were even now slipping from memory. One minute she was still clinging to their rags and tatters, the next they were irrevocably gone. She had a faint notion that she had dreamt that she was married to him, for she was aware of a decided relief, now that she was awake, to find that she was still single.

She remembered her decision of the early hours with satisfaction and some pride. It was a rather big decision for a girl of her age to make, while suitors were abounding and youth and beauty still in their first freshness. She had always suspected that there was in her a certain bigness that was not in Delia or Ruth. Now she was sure of it. She felt a certain exaltation such as a girl might feel who had decided to take the veil. She, too,

was in a sense taking the veil, and the fact that she would go on outwardly living the same life, no one knowing that she was vowed forever to Nobody-at-all, made her decision all the more praiseworthy. No one would understand her, of course; least of all, her mother. There was glory in being misunderstood. Her mother was probably off somewhere now, completely forgetful of her miserably sick daughter.

"Mother!" she called plaintively, half hoping that she would not be heard.

Mrs. Collingwood, faithful servitor, had evidently been awaiting the summons at the door, for she appeared like the genii, on the instant. If she expected any confidences, she was doomed to disappointment, for Barbara said nothing except, "Oh, I just wondered if you were there?" with a finality meant to suggest that the interview was over. She wanted no breakfast, she added; she wanted to be left alone.

"I wish you wouldn't draw back into your shell this way," Mrs. Collingwood said, as calmly as she could. "I wish you would talk things over with me."

"I do talk things over. But we don't get anywhere. I'm sick to death of talk-fests. We disagree fundamentally. I know what you think of me."

"What do you think that I think of you, Barbara?"

"You think I'm terribly depraved."

"My dear! Of course, I don't think you're depraved."

"Yes, you do. Perhaps you don't think that you do, but you do."

"I think you're a little reckless sometimes."

"It amounts to the same thing."

"That's perfect nonsense," cried Mrs. Collingwood in her emphatic way. "And you know it."

"I wish you were like other mothers."

"If you mean spineless and weak-kneed, I'm glad I'm not."

Barbara turned over on her side, away from her mother. "I feel so sick. I wish you'd leave me alone."

Wonderful nurse that she was, sympathetic, untiring, Mrs. Collingwood lacked, it seemed, the ultimate quality of the perfect watcher at bedsides. She sometimes seemed to lack imagination. She could not always divine her patient's symptoms. They had to be explained to her, and even then she did not always understand. On this occasion, for instance, it never occurred to her that Barbara's nerves might be on edge, and for that reason something in Barbara might be ready to shriek for an end of argument.

"Tell me just one thing," persisted Mrs. Collingwood in a voice slightly hard. "Are you engaged to Mr. Winsor?"

Barbara turned slowly in her bed and gazed at her mother. The blood slowly suffused her face; her lips tightened until the thin line of her mouth seemed almost white in contrast to the flaming cheeks. She hated her mother that moment with a passionate hatred.

She hesitated. Out of the past, the spirit of her old aspiring self seemed to reach forth a restraining hand. The new Barbara thrust it back.

"Are you engaged to him, Barbara?" Mrs. Collingwood persisted.

The lie direct came with difficulty, but it came.

"Yes," said Barbara, and the next instant would have given anything she possessed to have been able to recall the lie. She turned away her face, biting her lips, on the verge of tears.

"Barbara!" cried Mrs. Collingwood. "How could you?"

Barbara turned once more, hardened by her mother's evident despair; her cool, blue eyes regarded Mrs. Collingwood with appraising keenness. "I wish you had more sense," she said. "I wish you would leave me alone."

"But, my dear! This man. He's wicked. He's immoral. It's plain as the nose on your face."

"He's nothing of the sort. You don't understand. You take a prejudice against people and then imagine they are everything under the sun that's bad. You're narrow, and he's just a type you don't understand. He's exactly as fine as your pet, Tom Paraway. And he's got more gumption. He's lived out in the open and dug for himself, and Tom is just papa's boy."

"But, Barbara, he lied to us. You know. About the gloves."

"That's just like you, to make every little thing a great moral issue. That wasn't a lie. That was just an excuse. He wasn't trying to deceive anybody. He wanted to see me and he just had to say something to save his face. You're always slamming people you don't understand."

"My dear, you don't call Mr. Winsor subtle? He's just a simple, everyday, handsome rake."

She turned and energetically pushed up the shades. The sun shone mildly into the room and gave sudden life to the prevalent pink of wall and furniture and hangings. Mrs. Collingwood, strong, capable, efficient, set a dozen things to rights in the minute or so that elapsed before she discovered that Barbara was weeping. She went to the bedside and spoke with that proverbial gentleness which is also firm.

"I wouldn't cry about it, Barbara. There are things it's much better to discuss before it is too late, than after."

The weeping ceased for a moment. Barbara turned her head and gazed with cruel coldness into her mother's face. Mrs. Collingwood bit her lips to keep herself from tears. In an instant she had herself in control and was kneeling at the bedside.

"Barbara, dear," she said. "I have to do what seems

to me right, and I can't see you doing foolish things without trying to hold you back. When you're a mother, you'll begin to understand. And you know, Barbara, I may stop — being in your way — almost any time. I don't say that to upset you — only —"

"Yes, you do," Barbara protested. "You're just sentimentalizing. You're taking unfair advantage of me. You're just playing on my feelings."

"No. I am not playing on your feelings."

Once more, Barbara burst into tears. "Stop nagging me!" she cried. "Stop nagging me! I won't listen to you any more!" She thrust her fingers in her ears, sobbing, "I won't listen to you!"

She sobbed a long time, but Mrs. Collingwood did not budge from her place beside the bed. She was not weeping, but no one, seeing the two faces there, would have had any doubt whose suffering was the more intense.

At eleven that morning appeared Delia, alluringly attired and coiffured, with a rose in her cheeks so exquisitely faint that only a cold-blooded expert like Barbara would have had the heart to suspect it. Barbara was thoroughly glad to see her, for she was gay and enthusiastic, never a strain on the intellect and a very zephyr from the perfumed gardens of Araby. She had to come and talk over the theater-party, she cried, and forthwith did so. She had the gift of ready speech; in other words, she could prattle at an appalling rate, and the things she said in fifteen minutes would fill a long but not very interesting chapter. The only notable point about her discourse was its construction, for to that extent it was a work of art. Its movement was centripetal. That is, it was like a nutshell in a whirlpool, going round and round but ever nearer and nearer the central point. Suddenly it plunged.

"I think Mr. Winsor is perfectly wonderful!" cried Delia.

Barbara, still in bed, passed her slender fingers through her hair, brushing it back from her brow.

"I told you," she remarked as unconcernedly as she could.

"Of course you did, you dear. And of course I didn't believe you. But you were right, all right. I envy you awfully."

"He *is* pretty nice," Barbara admitted.

"He's the most wonderful thing I ever saw! Awfully romantic-looking, don't you think? They say he's always hated women up to now. Because he knows so much about them. Isn't that cruel? But he told somebody that. I should think you'd feel terribly flattered."

Barbara was certain that moment that she did feel very much flattered. "Why?" she asked innocently.

Delia, sitting at the edge of the bed, clutched both her shoulders and gently shook her. "You goose! You know why. He's crazy about you. A blind man could see it."

"Silly!" murmured Barbara, affectionately.

Delia, still holding her shoulders, bent over her so that the rim of her jaunty hat touched Barbara's forehead. "Now tell me, sly one," she whispered. "Are you engaged?"

Barbara's eyelids fluttered under the eager gaze; and hesitated. It was not a question of lying or not lying. She comforted herself in the matter of that other lie by telling herself that she really did not know herself whether she was engaged to Cleve Winsor or not.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" she said.

Delia was peeved at that, and drew away, shrugging her shoulders. "Perhaps there's hope for me then," she remarked, but did not explain exactly wherein the hope lay.

Barbara tried to puzzle out what Delia, who was not naturally abstruse, had in her mind. She had about

decided to tell her not to be a silly and to explain, when Ruth entered, bearing roses. She had evidently telephoned early in the morning and, having heard that Barbara was under the weather, had depleted the vases an adoring admirer, namely her father, kept filled for her in the vague hope that a plethora of roses would somehow counteract the lure of man; for he was a widower and Ruth was the lens in which all light for him was focussed.

Ruth's conversation proved also to be centripetal. It began with theater-parties in general, went round and round in the same way as Delia's, though with less bewildering speed, and at the proper moment plunged.

"Barbara, I think Mr. Winsor is wonderful," cried Ruth.

Now Barbara loved these friends of hers very much, but she had a canny, questioning mind, and it struck her as curious that both Delia and Ruth should go to such elaborate pains to assure her casually that they admired her taste. They had admired her taste before without thinking it necessary to preamble fifteen minutes round and round the hot porridge. She closed a door inside of her, feeling suddenly cold and lonely, as she realized that she could not confide even in these friends who had seemed so close — not in her mother, because her mother was naturally antagonistic and simply would not understand; not in her friends, because they had fish of their own to fry. Life seemed stark and desperate for a moment. Then she thought of Cleve Winsor, and it seemed to her that Spring had come to her frozen fields.

In the adjoining room, meanwhile, Mrs. Collingwood, miserable in the thought of Barbara's confession, and quite unconscious that in her dread lest Barbara marry Cleve Winsor, she had actually helped considerably to bring about that consummation — Mrs. Collingwood was telephoning. When, a quarter of an hour before, she

had told Tom that she had important news which she felt he must hear, she had not yet known how very serious that news was. For since, in quick succession, three friends had called her up, congratulating her on Barbara's "interesting" engagement. "Interesting" was the word. No one knew Mr. Winsor.

Mrs. Collingwood's answer in each case was frank. "Don't ask me anything about it, my dear. Barbara hasn't told me a thing except the mere fact. I can't imagine how the rumor should have got started. I'd rather you didn't say anything about it at present. It hasn't been announced. Really — please —" And so on. She turned to David, King of Israel, in the intervals between calls, as she always did when she had problems to solve.

Tom Paraway appeared, and was ushered directly into Mrs. Collingwood's sitting-room.

"Tom," said Mrs. Collingwood, "I wanted to tell you something before you heard it from some one else. Barbara is engaged to Mr. Winsor."

He took the blow with apparent calm. "I seem to be a poor guesser," he remarked.

"Why?"

"Winsor told me this morning they were engaged. I guessed that he was lying."

"You've seen him this morning?"

"Yes."

"How did that happen?"

"He spent the night at our house."

"You didn't leave here together."

"No. We met by accident."

"But do tell me how you happened to take him to your house. Do you really like him? Am I all wrong? Or is he really fine?"

Tom gave her an expurgated account of the proceedings of the previous night, shrouding the final incidents in a veil of words, so that without actually lying, he made

Winsor's acceptance of his hospitality plausible, without revealing the actual reason that prompted him to offer it. Only a lawyer could have circumnavigated the truth so gracefully without either lying or giving away his case. Young Lochinvar emerged from the tale with all flags flying. Tom salved his conscience with the mental observation that Mrs. Collingwood had enough to worry about for the time being without the added anxiety of knowing that her future son-in-law had been mildly drunk early that very morning.

"Do you know, Tom," said Mrs. Collingwood, "I almost hate that man?"

He laughed softly. "Almost?"

She saw the joke. "I don't want to hate anybody. But to think that Barbara is engaged to — that!"

"Are you sure she *is* engaged?"

"She told me herself."

"That ought to be authentic," he answered after a pause.

"And, Tom, in some mysterious fashion, it's got out."

"Got out?" he asked sharply.

"Everybody seems to know it. My telephone's been busy. Mrs. Jardine, Mrs. Halliwell, Mrs. Clipston —"

"Mrs. Clipston?"

"Yes. They all seem to have got the news from Mrs. Clipston. Do you know, I think I'll call her up, and find out where *she* got it."

A minute later she returned the receiver to the hook with a hard light in her eyes.

Tom rose sharply to his feet. "You needn't tell me," he said. "I heard the name."

"How do you account for it, Tom?"

He was standing by a table, emptying and shutting a box of matches. In a moment the contents were scattered over the floor. He gathered them together slowly and replaced the box on the table before he spoke.

"Mother has made a mistake in judgment, I should say. I am sure she told Mrs. Clipston deliberately. Mother isn't a gossip."

"I know she isn't, Tom," cried Mrs. Collingwood warmly, more sorry by far for him than for herself. "She just doesn't like Barbara, and I can't blame her for that. Barbara *is* frivolous."

"Father and Mother don't know Barbara, that's all."

Mrs. Collingwood bit her lip. Tears seemed to threaten her cherished composure so much more frequently these days than formerly, she thought, as she fought them back. The night and the morning had been difficult, even for her who throve on difficulties, as a rule. She felt weary with a weariness beyond any she had ever known. Tom watched her and his eyes seemed to deepen as he watched. She was conscious of it and was grateful.

He told her the whole story of his interview with his father. "I told him Winsor had said he and Barbara were engaged and I told him also that I had a strong notion Winsor was bluffing. He told Mother, of course, for Mother naturally had to know why I had decided to leave the office. Mother evidently thought I might change my mind if the engagement could be settled and fixed, as a public announcement might fix it. It was quite outrageous of her."

Mrs. Collingwood rose suddenly and laughed a hard little laugh. "Your father and mother must be relieved to know that you have been saved from Barbara. I am sure, if you were my son, I should feel exactly the same."

He did not answer. He was utterly miserable and, after all, there was nothing to say.

While this conversation was proceeding in Mrs. Collingwood's room, Barbara, in the room adjoining, was lying back in her pillows, finding that she had not much except monosyllables to contribute to the discussion of her

lover's charms; and she spent her energy in trying to discover what object these friends of hers had in dilating at such length upon Cleve Winsor. For dilate they did, for half an hour. They picked him apart and they put him together again. They discussed his face, his words, his walk, his manners, his past, his not impossible future; and always favorably. Barbara's bewilderment deepened. Ruth was not given to gossip; and Delia, who was Gossip Incarnate, was not, to put it mildly, invariably flattering in her comments. Ruth and Delia, for some reason, were evidently eager that she should marry Cleve Winsor.

Why? She became vague in the use of her monosyllables, and the girls, thinking her tired, rose to go. She thrust the interesting topic into a pigeonhole of her brain for future examination; and disclaimed weariness.

Thereupon, Delia suggested lunch at Maillard's for the three of them. But Ruth, it seemed, was lunching at the Cosmopolitan Club with a friend, and Barbara thought she really ought to stay home with her mother, for once.

"Oh, sly one!" cried Delia, kissing her. "Have a good time, sweetie."

"My dear, I think he's perfectly wonderful!" cried Ruth, as their cheeks met.

They went and for a minute Barbara lay motionless, pondering. The time was noon, and it suddenly occurred to her that between Act One and Two of the musical atrocity of the evening before, she had agreed to meet Cleve Winsor at an art-shop on Thirty-fourth Street promptly at eleven o'clock. She had been emphatic about the *promptly*. She disliked waiting for people. From the remote distance of early dawn, Nobody-at-all emerged an instant. He seemed to her a grotesque, absurd figure; and yet she hesitated, thoughtfully considering.

At this point, Mrs. Collingwood entered. "Tom's here," she said shortly.

Nobody-at-all was sent off into the domain of poor

jokes where he belonged. "How nice!" cried Barbara. "Tell him I'm awfully sorry I can't see him, but I'm still in bed. Hello, Tom!" she called cheerfully.

He answered from a distance.

"How do you like Minneapolis?" she shouted.

"How do you expect me to like him?"

"Very much, of course."

There was a moment's silence. "Well, you've got another guess coming," Tom called back.

"Do rig yourself up in some way," Mrs. Collingwood suggested. "He's really anxious to see you. And he wants you to have lunch with him and his mother."

(There are more ways than one of staving off Brother Winsor, had been Tom's thought.)

Barbara wrinkled her nose. "That highbrow?" she exclaimed in a scornful whisper.

Mrs. Collingwood was not in a mood to combat that or any other, even more vindictive description of Mrs. Paraway. "Tom's got an engagement with his mother at one, but he says he'll wait here all afternoon if necessary, as he intends to see you."

A queer, rebellious light shot across Barbara's eyes. But her words were agreeable enough. "Well, if he's so stubborn, and can wait half an hour —"

"I'm sure he'll wait. Can't I help you?"

"No," said Barbara, without stirring from her pillows. "You'd better go and entertain your friend."

When Mrs. Collingwood departed, Barbara leaped out of her bed and into her bath, and out of her bath and into her clothes with a speed that would have astounded her mother. With some makeshifts, she arranged her hair in three minutes instead of the usual thirty. She had made up her mind definitely that she would not keep her appointment with Cleve Winsor; but her mother's antagonism and the conversational gyrations of Ruth and Delia and, last of all, the unendurable patience of the young

gentleman in the next room, had determined her to exercise what is known as a woman's prerogative. At the conclusion of twenty minutes Barbara was walking rapidly eastward on Fifty-seventh Street.

Mrs. Collingwood and Tom, in the adjoining room, made no attempt to converse. Tom sat, bent forward, with hands folded between his knees, playing a tune with his feet on the hardwood floor. Mrs. Collingwood, restless, was moving to and fro.

"You know," said Tom at last, "I have an idea in the back of my head that Barbara is not engaged to Brother Winsor."

"Why?" Mrs. Collingwood stopped in her peregrinations and turned eagerly toward him.

"If they were really engaged, he would have told me last night."

"But Barbara told me herself."

"Well, you know, Barbara may have thought she could upset you a bit —"

"Well, you can ask her yourself. She must be dressed by this time." She knocked at the door. "Barbara! Will you be ready soon?" No answer. "It's half past twelve." No answer. "She must have gone to sleep again."

Mrs. Collingwood opened the door. There were plentiful signs in the room of a lightning toilet, but no sign of Barbara herself.

"Tom!" cried Mrs. Collingwood. "She's gone."

He jumped to his feet and let his own eyes give him the evidence. Then he laughed, softly, but a little harshly. "I don't seem to be a match for Winsor and Company," he said.

For the first time in all the years he had known Barbara he felt resentment at a slight of hers, coupled with a sense of shame that he should have played the doormat so long. He looked at his watch.

"Mother expects me down town," he said quietly. "If you'll excuse my hurrying away, I think I'd better go. I'm late now."

"It's terrible, Tom," said Mrs. Collingwood with her thoughts still on Barbara.

"Have you any idea where they are going to meet?"

"Not the slightest. And she *is* so young."

He laughed again, a kinder laugh than before, but not without its note of resentment. "She's young, dear lady, but she knows an awful lot. And she's got a head on her shoulders. I think I should be inclined to trust her to take care of herself."

"Still, you've given up everything to keep your eye on her."

"Oh, that was purely officious," he said carelessly. "I just wanted an excuse to be around. Of course, if I *can* keep her from stubbing her toe against the flagstones I'd like to do it. But it isn't really necessary." At the door he turned again. "I have a notion, by the way, that a girl of Barbara's pep rather objects to having a male governess. I may be wrong, but anyway, the idea seems to be worth considering."

Five minutes later he was in a taxi, rushing, fifteen minutes behind schedule, to meet Mrs. Paraway at Brentano's. Two blocks before he came abreast of her, he recognized Barbara's back and her short, brisk gait. He jumped forward to tell the driver to stop, hesitated and sank back into the shadows of the rear seat. The resentment had clutched him again. For the first time he deliberately missed an opportunity to be near her. The car whizzed past her. She did not see him; and he tried to forget her for five minutes by switching his thoughts to his mother and her peculiar lapse of judgment.

XI

BARBARA had named the little art shop on Thirty-fourth Street as the meeting place in order to avoid a discussion with her mother. If Cleve Winsor called for her at the house, there would be glances and possibly arguments in his very presence, her mother having neither tact nor social delicacy. She could avoid all friction by telling her mother (if her mother happened to get between her and the front door) that she was going to the hairdresser's and thence to Delia's for lunch — and the road would be clear, since Mrs. Collingwood made it a point not to question her daughter's word. There can be no debating the fact that, to a certain point, existence is greatly simplified by skillful lying. Of course, there is a Nemesis, but everybody knows that she does not nail one lie in ten. There is also Conscience to reckon with, but Conscience can be shown his place. Barbara had her own conscience well under control. Far from regretting her frequent deception of her mother, she felt a slight contempt for that lady's innocent trustfulness. In a world where the lie is as casual a weapon as a dagger in Sicily, to be "easy" seemed naturally more reprehensible than to be untrue.

She walked swiftly down the Avenue, hampered at every step by her tight skirt, but feeling no resentment, since fashion was to her a divine institution admitting doubts only at penalty of Gehenna and Outer Darkness. She was quite liberal in her religious views, not caring much about the subject, but she was a bigot in matters of style. To her it was a moral question: a woman, dressed without regard to mode, was spiritually slipshod. Style was not so much a matter of money as of thought. She opened

her soul to every new trick of dress that even in wartime floated over from Paris, very much as Mrs. Paraway opened hers to every intellectual movement that emanated from that fecund metropolis. Barbara and Mrs. Paraway had their similarities; they both disliked Barbara's mother, for instance.

Barbara had walked ten blocks before she discovered that the time was moving on to one o'clock. She jumped on a bus, therefore, and climbed the perilous winding stair to the top. The sky was clear blue with streaks of tattered gossamers pointing southward; the air was crisp. Gazing on the world from her lofty seat, she saw the houses and cars and people, not singly, but as part of a stirring picture; and suddenly remembered that she always rode inside the bus to keep her hair and her hat in trim. To float down upon this busy stream, watching it from a sort of crow's nest, was a new experience, and rather thrilling. Everything seemed wonderfully clean. Even the people on the sidewalk seemed to partake of the crystal quality of the day; and it seemed easier than usual to imagine them upright and sincere. The splendid houses thrilled her as never before. Some day she would have one of those. She saw the footmen and the butlers, the silver and gold, the velvet and satin and silk — all the gorgeous regalia, and it seemed to her the only worthy end to strive for.

All the way to Thirty-fourth Street Barbara moved like a princess on a state elephant between two rows of magic palaces. The bridegroom of the early dawn, Nobody-at-all, had been quite forgotten. Two hours only ago he had seemed firmly fixed in the place that had been Cleve Winsor's; but, each in his way or hers; Mrs. Collingwood, Delia, Ruth and Tom had served to re-enthrone Young Lochinvar; and this time more securely than before. At the golden end of the street he was waiting for her, strong, handsome, chivalrous, the hero she had

dreamed of and scarcely dared hope ever to discover; in prosy garments on a prosy street, the hero was waiting for her. It was all too wonderful for words.

The bus stopped at the upper side of Thirty-fourth Street. She descended and crossed eastwards, halting midway, quiet, self-possessed, while a dozen or twenty cars bounded forward like hounds at the signal, sweeping north. She gazed curiously at them. People always interested her, particularly rich people. At the tail end of the pack was a mauve-colored car whose chauffeur she recognized, and she prepared to bow. The car rolled past. In the rear seat were Mrs. Paraway and Ruth Torrey. Facing them sat Tom. Barbara did not bow after all, for Tom, with flushed cheeks, was looking into Ruth's face; and did not notice Barbara.

She crossed to the sidewalk, conscious that she was suddenly tired, and that the gold and bright lights had all faded from the magical city and the palaces were nothing but shops and a red-stone caravanserai.

It was absurd, she cried to herself, utterly absurd! What difference did it make to her where or with whom Tom Paraway spent his hours? Ruth had said she was going to lunch at the Cosmopolitan Club with a friend. That was a woman's club. The friend must be a woman. Not Tom, therefore, but Mrs. Paraway. It amounted to the same thing. Ruth had not been willing evidently to say with whom she was going to luncheon. She must have had a reason for this secrecy.

Barbara began to see light in another direction. She walked quickly up Fifth Avenue and east on Thirty-fifth Street to get herself into a fit condition to appear before the Fairy Prince. She admitted to herself that the picture of Tom Paraway absorbed in conversation with Ruth Torrey hurt something in her beside her pride. She now realized that in the back of her head had been the firm conviction, supporting and steadying her, that though all

other friends should fail, Tom Paraway would not fail. Tom, in wild desperation at the thought that she had accepted Cleve Winsor, had possibly fallen at Ruth's feet on the rebound. It was incredible, particularly of Tom. But men did do such incredible things. But Tom was not altogether like other men, and, besides, he had been at her house not a half hour ago. What were men made of?

She met Cleve Winsor in front of the art-shop, though she was two solid hours late for the appointment. It is significant that she never for an instant doubted that he would be there, waiting ten hours if need be. She had found by experience that men always did wait for her, a discovery which enabled her to eat her pie and have it too, since it laid the suitor on the leash while it left her free to squeeze in an extra call or a visit to the hair-dresser's with no fear of missing the young man when it suited her convenience to meet him. In charity to Barbara, it must be said that she generally made her appointments for places where there were chairs. She herself realized that this was very thoughtful of her. It was, to a certain extent, a matter of expediency, moreover, for she found that it helped to keep the young man, whoever he was, open-minded to excuses. But her precaution was really unnecessary. Her excuses were always perfect, and expressed with lovely penitence.

Cleve Winsor had a large patience in affairs of the heart; and considerable experience, in spite of his reputed misogyny. If Barbara was certain of his appearing, so was he of hers. He let the ladies in the shop show him every engraving and reproduction they had, and waited without increase of temperature. It was like Nursie entertaining Baby — one picture book after another. The elder of the ladies was plain, and fortunately it was she who had to go out to lunch; for the other was not only young, but attractive, with a dimple in her large expanse

of cheek and a clever tongue, which she seemed to enjoy exercising — a college girl evidently, still intoxicated with the capabilities of the human mind, particularly her own.

The time passed delightfully.

She enjoyed hugely snaring him in her witticisms, and it was a pleasure to him to see her blush at some word of admiration which both knew was altogether too frank. Both felt a happy tingling in their veins. It was really very romantic. Moreover, the fact that they had friends in common, solid pillars of Poughkeepsie, at once raised the whole matter, as far as the girl was concerned, out of the limbo of street adventure into the pure ether of divinely appointed friendship.

Her name was Joan Reid. She spoke it softly, a little frightened, suddenly overcome by the wonder and sheer beauty of romance. A customer, entering, interrupted the idyllic scene. Cleve Winsor stared idly through the window, on the watch for Barbara, as he waited for the customer to go. This unnecessary person went at last. Again Young Lochinvar and Joan had the shop to themselves. He basked in the admiration her witty repartee revealed, where it was meant to hide. The blush on her cheek was permanent now. She bit her lip as he took her hand and pressed it in parting, and the last gibe was actually tremulous.

He left the shop, planning to meet Barbara somewhere outside. He met her in the doorway, coming unexpectedly from the east. It was the stretch from Fifth Avenue that he had been keeping guard over.

"Did you think I wasn't coming?" she said, looking up into his eyes. "I wasn't. I made up my mind absolutely that I wasn't, and here I am."

She laughed happily, and he, too, tried to laugh, but the laugh was nervous and unconvincing. He took her arm and tried to steer her toward the Avenue.

It seemed that she had business in the art-shop — some directions she had to give about the framing of a picture she had bought there a day or so ago.

"Oh, we'll do that after lunch," he said.

"Perfectly absurd!" she cried. "When we're right here. Come on. I want your advice."

They entered the shop. It took Barbara an interminable while to select the bit of molding she wanted. Miss Reid was distrait, moreover, deaf, clumsy, without ideas of her own; in every way different from the Miss Reid Barbara had patronized in the past. Barbara decided she must be ill, but was curt to her nevertheless. Cleve was of no help. He insisted on turning his back on the whole transaction and studying a picture of a blue, turbulent bit of ocean with no land or sail in sight, only waves, restless, malignant, numberless into infinity, suggesting madness and death by thirst.

At last the ten deadly minutes were over. Barbara and Cleve Winsor left the shop. Miss Reid watched them go, standing behind the counter with a bit of gold molding still in her hand. Very slowly she closed her eyes and kept them closed, getting her mental bearings best with the familiar physical surroundings blotted out. She opened her eyes again after a while and began to straighten out the counter, hanging up bits of molding she had shown Miss Collingwood. She must have been crazy. Yes, she was positive she must have had a brainstorm. She laughed at herself scornfully and not without pain. She felt sorry, incidentally, for Miss Collingwood.

That young lady lunched with Cleve Winsor at his father's favorite hostelry, the St. James, the younger Winsor having inherited the elder's instinct for knowing when to be conservative. Every one took them for honeymooners. They were, in fact, lyrically happy, and of great profit to the management, for they ordered much and ate practically nothing at all.

XII

TOM met his mother in the little room in the rear of Brentano's where the fine editions are sold. She was seated and had a half dozen specimen volumes on the table before her.

"What a help you are, Tom!" she cried as he entered. "I thought we said twelve-thirty."

He did not have a chance to explain, even if he had cared to do so, for at that moment, Ruth, studying the bindings on a shelf opposite the door, turned and reached out her hand. Tom expressed polite surprise.

"Isn't it nice?" said Mrs. Paraway, with her pleasant smile. "Ruth says she'll join us for lunch."

He was annoyed. He had suspected once or twice that his mother was playing a game and that her sporadic devotion to Ruth was merely a move in it. He was not in a mood to enter with enthusiasm into any of his mother's games. Besides, he had much to say to her on the matter of Mrs. Clipston. But Ruth's gaze was so appealing and tender that he could not bring himself to declare, as he was inclined to do, that he had an important engagement and would have to be excused. He felt immensely sorry for Ruth. She was such a little fly and his mother was such an astute and alluring spider. He decided that he could scarcely be decent enough to Ruth.

They selected the books with the aid of an epigram or two from Mrs. Paraway and some plain common sense from Ruth, who suggested timidly that a young couple probably would prefer Stevenson to Carlyle; and Kipling in twenty-five volumes, bound in cloth, to Kingsley in

twenty, bound by Zaehrnsdorf in crushed Levant. Tom, who, at that moment, did not feel much interested in literature of any sort, irreverently intimated that eighty dollars would buy an electric washing-machine, which, unless he miscalculated the bridegroom's finances egregiously, would be vastly more welcome than Kipling and Kingsley together.

Ruth laughed and approved. But Mrs. Paraway did neither. She merely smiled indulgently and gave the clerk her card and the address of the bride. When she had done this she turned again to Tom with that same indulgent smile. "Materialist!" she said.

He had an awful impulse to cry "Oh, hell!" He scarcely knew why, except that life seemed too difficult, too exacting to leave him any time or patience to endure this weak dilution which was literariness. He did not utter the unpardonable exclamation. In fact, he gave no indication that he wanted to utter it. He picked up a volume of the "Tower of London" man — What was his name? Ainsworth — exquisitely bound in tree-calf — a chambermaid in brocade — and turned the leaves thoughtfully. Then he spoke.

"When it comes to a tussle for souls between any one of these fellows and an electric washing-machine," he remarked slowly, "my money is all on the washing-machine."

"He's bad-tempered," Mrs. Paraway observed, laying her gloved hand on Ruth's arm. "Men must be kept fed like the other animals. Realism never has such a hold on men as immediately before a meal. Let's take him to lunch."

They did so, driving up Fifth Avenue in the mauve-colored car. As they were about to cross Thirty-fourth Street, Mrs. Paraway saw a familiar, slender figure in the middle of the street, watching for the cars to pass. She gave Tom a quick glance. He was riding backwards

and, of course, could not see Barbara, but in a moment he would, as he was not conversing more than courtesy absolutely demanded; and was watching the cars and the sidewalk beyond as one who is seeking a certain face. She swept her mind for a subject to hold him, as a wrecked mariner will sweep the sea for a sail. She had about five seconds to find one.

"Isn't it interesting," she remarked casually to Ruth, "about Barbara Collingwood?"

The ruse was a bit desperate, but it worked. Tom turned, looking straight into her eyes. "What?" he asked, a bit brusquely.

Ruth gave Tom a quick glance and colored slightly. "I haven't heard anything," she murmured.

"She's engaged, you know," Mrs. Paraway went on in her pleasantest manner, "to Mr. Winsor."

"How lovely!" cried Ruth, suddenly radiant.

"He told Tom himself."

Tom was leaning forward, his face flushed, his eyes flashing. "Winsor was bluffing. He had his reasons for wanting me to believe he was engaged. I told Father so. He must have misunderstood, or you must have misunderstood." He turned to Ruth. She looked unhappy. "I beg your pardon," he added. "There seems to have been a rather ghastly misunderstanding. I happen to know that Mrs. Collingwood had no intention of announcing any engagement. Or Barbara, either, for that matter."

"I saw Barbara this morning," said Ruth. "She wouldn't say yes or no." All the radiance was gone from her face and she looked hollow-eyed.

"Why, if that's the case," said Mrs. Paraway, "of course, I'll say no more about it. After all, it is not a subject of world-shaking importance either way, is it?"

Barbara was safely passed long ago. They were turning into Thirty-eighth Street.

No meal could be dull with Mrs. Paraway present, and

the heaviest gloom always dissolved and floated away in the electric-fan breeze of her calculated talk. Aristotle came in with the oysters and George Ade with the entrée. Don Quixote with his Dulcinea followed and a heroine or two of H. G. Wells brushed elbows in a sentence with Diana of the Crossways, Diana of Ephesus and the president of the New York Society for Equal Suffrage, with a sharp thrust for the last. Even Barbara Collingwood re-entered the conversation, deliberately adjured, in order to lay the ghost of the oppressive thought that there was a topic which must not be discussed.

Mrs. Paraway talked merrily on. She enjoyed talking for the same reason that other people, not necessarily her inferiors in intellect, enjoy sweeping a room. She drove her broom into dusty corners and lo, the effect was immediate. She did not definitely banish any dust, it is true, driving it from one resting place merely to allow it to settle comfortably in another. Most people thought her intellectually an admirable and thorough housekeeper, only a few discovering after years that she practiced her art mainly for its immediate rewards and cared little or nothing about the definite removal of dust. Tom had suspected the truth once or twice and wondered whether his father, who had a piercing eye for shams, knew. The very suspicion, recurring at intervals without tangible proof, made him miserable.

Ruth said little during the course of the meal, but then Ruth never did say much. She was a girl one was always tempted to describe in terms of flowers; and one does not expect wit from a rose or paradoxes from a lily, but expects fragrance and delicate color and texture, a hint of the immortality of beauty, and more than a hint of the brevity of its individual manifestations. All these Ruth gave in a measure that made the things she lacked seem for the instant garish and undesirable. She had only one adorer, her father, who passed uneasy nights between the

twin fears that she would not marry the man she loved, and that she would.

Tom felt the charm of her loveliness and of her gentle spirit, uncomplicated by contact with modernity. For the roaring current that was tearing away shores and old landmarks and shifting bars and stream-beds left her little island undisturbed. The new liberties, the new exactions, the obliteration of old reverences, the consciousness of beauty and wonder in matters once despised, that moiling river in spring flood which swept Barbara off her feet, was to Ruth merely a disturbance without meaning. It was the vague, infernal force which in all ages is supposed by "idealists" to war against the "sacred illusions" of life.

A few people, Mrs. Collingwood, for instance, wondered why two girls so utterly different as Barbara and Ruth should be such close friends. These two had been roommates by decree at boarding-school and had happened afterwards to live within a block of each other in New York. Besides, Ruth had a childlike way of adoring folk whom others would admire, possibly, and no more, for certain dazzling qualities which they themselves did not possess. Barbara enjoyed being adored. She felt, moreover, that Ruth was trustworthy, "square." She respected her for the very truthfulness which Barbara herself did not always consider it expedient to practice. Incidentally, silent Ruth was a good foil to her who could gabble to fine effect. Ruth, taken altogether, was a pleasant and useful friend to have.

Tom let his mother do most of the talking, and when he could do so unobserved, regarded Ruth thoughtfully. It is inevitable that the consciousness that a young lady is deeply in love with you should cast a certain glamour over that young lady's appearance and ascribe to her certain admirable qualities of intellect and judgment in addition to those which she actually possesses. Tom felt

sure that Ruth had somewhere, within that form of sweet beauty, the quick and eager thoughts that Barbara had, the inquisitive, restless mind, the independent spirit — all of Barbara's fine qualities without her faults; and with them all, an enticing lovelinesss, a dryad sweetness beckoning him on to green hilltops. He felt resentful of Barbara's deceits, suspicious of the fineness of the grain, since she could abide Cleve Winsor.

A man could be very happy, married to Ruth.

He remarked that fact to himself with utter coolness; he could not imagine himself in the position of that man. He loved Barbara and he did not love Ruth. Barbara had a dozen faults, some of which made him wince, and one or two of which he would not have endured in a man. He happened to love Barbara, and that was all there was about it.

And he had shortcomings of his own.

His resentment against Barbara faded. He would have given his immortal soul that moment, he thought, if he had jumped from the taxi an hour before and carried her off with him to some quiet restaurant, and were talking with her now. Ass that he had been to be resentful!

Tom planned to escape immediately after luncheon; but Mrs. Paraway had plans of a conflicting nature. She wished to keep her eye on Tom and at the first signs of restlessness on his part produced theater-tickets, three of them. He tried to make her understand by a look and gesture that he simply would not go, but she seemed suddenly obtuse. Thereupon he decided to be firm and declared flatly, though courteously, that he could not spare the time. Mrs. Paraway seemed to accept this as final, insisting only that Tom accompany them to the theater and exchange the third ticket himself. Descending from the automobile, Mrs. Paraway turned her ankle and had to be helped gently to her seat in the orchestra, protesting

with an epigram or two. Tom could not leave her after that.

It did not perceptibly help his temper, during the two and a half hours that followed, to perceive, as he did clearly, that he had been successfully kidnapped with far less effort than he had expended that morning in failing to kidnap Cleve Winsor.

XIII

DURING luncheon and the hours that immediately followed it, the Charm which Mrs. Paraway had that morning discovered was Cleve Winsor's was strongly in evidence. Young Lochinvar was obviously intent on pleasing, and Barbara's radiant face revealed clearly enough that he was successful.

The luncheon was an unmarred delight. Winsor made no reference to the pantry episode, he claimed no privileges because of it, not even the protecting hold of her elbow which he had allowed himself in Minneapolis after half a day's acquaintance. Barbara was led to imagine that he was sorry for his excessive fervor of the previous evening. He was profoundly respectful, particularly in matters intellectual, in which he yielded to her invariably. Barbara was touched by his evident remorse, and deeply stirred by his devotion.

Throughout luncheon he talked of his own life. That happened to be the subject he could talk on most fluently; and it was a thrillingly interesting story to Barbara. He told her of his family, first of all, suggesting in his tones that these marvelous relatives — for he painted them in vivid colors — could be her own for the asking. Barbara, who read the newspapers more than most girls of her age, had read about his father. He was the greatest lumberman of Minnesota, one of the greatest in the country, a force in railroads and in paper, a man of extraordinary vitality, still under fifty.

"You'll read some more about Dad one of these days. He's the biggest man in the country since Morgan died."

"He must be wonderful!" cried Barbara.

"You bet he's wonderful. Everything he does is wonderful. They talk about him for hours at the camps nights, swapping stories about the things he's done. And when he's off on trips, he reads poetry by the yard. What do you know about that? A man named Whitman, mostly. And then something about an old booze-fighter named Captain Craig, and something else about a man named Cory who's got everything under the sun and then goes home and shoots himself. I never could see why. But Dad'll sit before a fire in the woods and reel off lines and lines of it. 'And Richard Cory one warm summer's night'— that's the way it ends —' went home and put a bullet through his head.' He calls that poetry. I can't read the stuff."

Barbara was thrilled. There was something extraordinarily romantic in the picture of this captain of industry before a campfire in the wilds, reciting poetry. She wished that Winsor junior enjoyed that sort of thing. But he didn't, and she was glad that he made no pretense about it.

"I'm not the reading sort," he was saying. "I like to do things and to hear about people who do things. I haven't any use for the gassing kind. Poets may be all right here in the East, but in the West it's the man with red blood that counts. The man that can chop down a tree and put through a big deal. That's the kind of a man I want to be." His manner implied that that was the kind of a man he already was.

In that game of hearts during luncheon, Winsor took every trick. Everything he said and did seemed to Barbara not only right, but beautiful. She accepted his judgments, expressed and implied, without question; his standards seemed the only standards she would ever care to know. Her critical faculty — so keen as a rule — was benumbed, asleep. He could have told her that the obviously German waiter was a converted Chinaman and she

would have believed him, and thought him wonderful for perceiving what she would never have discovered. She would have eloped with him then and there, if he had wished it. But he expressed no such desire. He merely begged to be allowed to go shopping with her. She answered him with her eyes. "To the uttermost stars," they said. With her lips she remarked, "Of course. If you want to."

They took a taxi to Altman's, and spent two hours ricochetting between that stately palace and the populous and no less imposing house of Macy, a quarter of a mile westward. They made the journey twice, back and forth through crowded thoroughfares, Winsor Unmarried praising her persistence where Winsor Married would have roundly denounced her vacillation.

Shopping took on a new glory for her. He helped her select a hat and the hat had a halo in her sight. She even allowed him to help her select some silk stockings, feeling slightly wicked but greatly thrilled at the intimacy of it all. They went through the furniture departments of three stores, coming upon them as if by accident in each case; and pointed out to each other the styles they preferred, quite casually, but with a knocking heart.

From one to five that day Barbara walked along the glowing avenues of romance. The shimmer of dawn was over the world. There was no past, there was no future, there was no mother at home, no troublesome Tom Paraway, no attractive Chester, smiling in the offing, no Ruth, no Delia with perplexing eulogies. All life was focussed in this sudden, overpowering love. She had seen it afar off a month ago at Minneapolis. She had dreamt of it in the interim, hoping, doubting, counting the days. Here it was, real, "wonderful," a thing beyond the mind's power of imagining.

They took tea at "The Purple Cow" at five.

Mrs. Jardine was there with a friend, and bowed with

what Barbara thought unnecessary enthusiasm. She was a slender little woman, quivering almost visibly with energy, middle-aged, warm-hearted, clever in her way, but incurably optimistic concerning engagements. She wore a bonnet with strings, a lingering tribute to her husband, who had died in the nineties and who had liked her in bonnets with strings. Barbara was amazed to see her rise and cross fifty feet of intervening space to come to the half-hidden table at which she and Cleve Winsor were sitting.

"Dear Barbara," cried Mrs. Jardine. "How you have fooled us all!"

Barbara looked up a trifle coolly. She did not like Mrs. Jardine. Possibly the bonnet had something to do with her attitude. But Mrs. Jardine always struck her as a sentimental bore. "Fooled? How?"

"And is this Mr. Winsor?" proceeded Mrs. Jardine.

"I beg your pardon for not introducing you," said Barbara, more perplexed than ever. "Mrs. Jardine — Mr. Winsor."

"I am *so* glad to meet you. You are a very fortunate young man."

Cleve Winsor turned to Barbara for light. She was frowning. "I think there must be some mistake," she said, making no effort to hide the fact that she wished Mrs. Jardine to return to her own table.

"Are you still trying to fool us?" the lady went on coyly. "Everybody knows it now."

"Knows what?"

"Why, you dear little hypocrite, about your engagement."

Barbara flushed and Cleve, standing, looked down and began to tap the table. There was an uncomfortable pause.

"I'm not engaged, Mrs. Jardine," said Barbara at last. "I don't see how you could have heard that I was.

Would you mind denying it? Thank you so much." She held out her hand. "Good-by."

"But, my dear Barbara, I heard it —"

"Yes, people are queer, aren't they?" Barbara broke in, irrelevantly. "Thank you so much. Good-by."

Mrs. Jardine mumbled something or other, and recrossed the room looking somewhat bedraggled. Barbara, not wishing quite yet to meet Cleve Winsor's glance, followed her passage with a hard look on her face, and saw her sit down as one exhausted, lean over the table and begin to talk volubly.

At last she turned again to her companion. "Have some hot tea," she remarked, with her hand on the teapot.

He did not answer, but looked at her for a long time with an expression about the mouth and eyes which she had never seen there before, a flat unresponsiveness that was almost defiance. For the first time she noticed a bulldog quality in his chin. She tried to meet his glance and for some reason could not.

She felt a ghastly sinking sensation, and shivered. It seemed to her the earth had cracked open in the three foot space between Cleve Winsor and herself, and that they were suddenly separated by a widening gulf, black and deep. She knew why. Cleve Winsor suspected her of having started the rumor that they were engaged. It was stupid of him, but men were stupid beings. It occurred to her that he was probably thinking that she was anxious to make sure of him, and he did not enjoy having his hand forced. Heavens! There were other men in the world!

He admitted after a while that he did want a hot cup of tea, and conversation began anew. But the sparkle had gone out of it. They were both constrained, and Barbara could see by the expression of his eyes that he was trying to work his way through certain bits of conflicting evidence. She felt impelled once to have the matter out, then and there, but her pride stepped in; and she de-

cided that a man who could suspect so quickly did not deserve explanations. She felt tired, sick, ready to drop. She would have given much to have seen her mother come into the tea-room at that moment and take her home and put her to bed.

Winsor offered to escort her to Fifty-seventh Street, but she refused the offer with quiet emphasis. He begged her to let him secure a taxi. She declared she wanted to walk. Still he lingered, reluctant to go with this chasm between them. He lingered a moment too long, for as they walked slowly from the side entrance of the tea-room toward the Avenue, they ran into Tom Paraway, waiting patiently with his runabout at the curb; and was forced to stand by helplessly and listen to her delighted acceptance of a ride. He had the grace to grin and accept the onus of the joke.

"How in blazes did you know —"

Tom laughed and did not stop to explain that Barbara liked tea at five and that when she did not take it at home the chances were good that she was taking it at the "Purple Cow." He might have used this information to point out that in some respects an acquaintanceship covering years has advantages over even the most hectic "rush." He did nothing of the sort. He called, "So long, old man," waved his hand flippantly, and was off, moving slowly toward the late afternoon procession of cars crawling up the Avenue.

XIV

BARBARA admitted to herself comfortably that grandpa had his uses, sinking back into the cushions and regarding the electrically lighted occupants of passing cars with a languid, world-weary air, as though to say, "Let the earth open and swallow you. Who cares? Your dress is hideous anyway, and your hat is a crime."

"Comfortable?"

"Yes. Thanks."

These three words carried them, conversationally, for twenty blocks.

"Home?" asked Tom at Fifty-seventh Street, with his eye on the traffic officer.

"Heavens, no!"

They sped into the Park. Night and great trees were about them now — a fettered, domesticated night, tended and cultivated trees, with lawn below and artificial lakes and a menagerie and goats and donkeys slumbering just out of eyeshot: a civilized urban garden, nature tamed almost to purring; and yet, a fairyland.

Barbara closed her eyes, happy to relax and shut out the world and feel the cold wind against her face. She was aware now how tautly strung she had been all afternoon. She had been thrillingly happy; but the happiness had been somewhat of a strain. She had tried so hard to be at her best every minute — beautiful, graceful, witty, entertaining — and at the same time to keep Cleve Winsor in the posture of the humble subject, with his neck under her scarlet heel.

With Tom she need do no play-acting. She knew he adored her and, besides, she did not care whether he did or

not. She could relax to her heart's content; and did so, remotely conscious that there was something nice about Tom, a sense of peace. He was a quiet haven good for ships to anchor in until the wind was done with blowing for the time; in this respect very like a nurse she had been devoted to sporadically for a similar reason from her seventh to her tenth year. No one ever thought of marrying one's nurse. She opened her eyes and closed them again, finding in the stern gaze of a bronze Daniel Webster no incentive to keep them open. She should have looked to the right, where a full moon hung dreamily over and within dark water surrounded by dark trees. A fairy bridge shimmered silvery in the distance. Stars sparkled through bare branches, seeming to hang like jewels from the twigs.

Who had told Mrs. Jardine that she and Cleve Winsor were engaged? That question beat at the door of her consciousness, but she locked and bolted the door, refusing to entertain it. The whole matter of Cleve Winsor was so vital that she thrust it out of her mind with all the energy of her will, knowing that it demanded vigor and clear insight which at that moment she was without. She was like a mermaid taking temporary refuge on shore from the amorous pursuit of the sea-monster, luxuriating in an alien element with all the difficulties of her own for an hour remote. Her face was expressionless, neither glad nor unhappy. The trouble was that though she could banish all problems from her conscious mind, she could not banish them from that inner mind whose judgments we note and value and call intuition. Barbara's calculations were going on, though she supposed that she was thinking of nothing at all, or at most of the freshness of the air against her cheeks and the pleasant song of the motor.

They left the Park behind at One Hundred and Tenth Street and turned west toward Riverside Drive. About them once more were the lights and noises and hurrying

legs and swinging arms of the great city. Barbara felt the spell break.

"Tom," she said, turning to him suddenly.

"Don't scare me to death," he said. "I didn't know you were still there. I thought you'd got off and gone home."

"I've got to telephone. Mother'll be crazy. She probably thinks I've eloped."

"No, she doesn't."

"How do you know?"

"I telephoned her at the tea-room."

"You did?"

"I told her the lost sheep was corralled."

"Did you say that?" Barbara's voice was sharp.

"No. I told her you were taking tea very respectably with a certain Mr. Winsor of Minneapolis, and incidentally entertaining Mrs. Jardine. She seemed relieved."

Barbara caught her breath, whether at the mention of Mrs. Jardine or at the prospect of imminent destruction suddenly presented by a flying Ford bound uptown, is inessential. Tom dodged the Ford, made a savage generalization concerning all flivver-drivers and slowly descended the steep hill to the Drive.

"Mrs. Jardine was funny," Barbara remarked thoughtfully.

"So your mother thought."

"Heavens! Did she telephone Mother?"

"She did."

Barbara had a vision of Nemesis approaching with a club. "Great Scott!" she murmured.

"What's the matter?"

"Mrs. Jardine thinks I'm engaged."

"She certainly does."

"She probably asked Mother about it."

"I think she did."

"Well, Mother nagged at me so, that, just to worry

her, I told her I was. She probably told Mrs. Jardine it was all settled. What do you know?" Barbara's voice sounded gloomy.

"Well, aren't you engaged?"

"Of course not."

"I see," murmured Tom expressively, giving the carburetor an extra contribution of gas as he turned with a spurt up the Drive. "In other words, you lied like a streak."

"I didn't lie," she retorted emphatically. "I didn't try to deceive anybody. Mother just got me so mad I had to say something to get even."

"Oh, I'm not reproaching you."

"You are!"

"Have it your own way," he grumbled.

Conversation lagged after this exchange of courtesies.

"You're an awful gloom," she remarked as they were crossing the viaduct at One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street.

"You've said that before."

"Why don't you talk?"

"I didn't know you'd hired me for my qualities as an entertainer. I thought I was doing duty merely as a chauffeur."

"You are the limit."

"Don't mention it."

Another long pause ensued. "I thought you pretended to be my friend," she said at last.

"I don't pretend anything."

"Well, I thought you *were* my friend."

"I am."

"Why won't you talk to me, then? You see the box I'm in. You know I want advice."

"No, you don't, Bee. You just want some one to line up a lot of targets for you to knock down."

"You're perfectly crazy!"

"On with the bouquets!"

"I never was so disappointed in anybody in my life."

"I didn't think you ever cared enough to be disappointed. Thanks for the implied compliment."

"I do care. I've always liked you very much," she said emphatically, adding, "as a friend."

"I shouldn't expect you to like me as an enemy."

"You know what I mean."

"Not in the least, unless you mean that you'd hate to marry anybody you considered your friend. And that doesn't seem to me to make sense."

"I wish I knew what is the matter with you."

"There's nothing the matter with me."

"Why are you so queer then?"

"I'm not queer."

"You're not a bit the way you used to be."

"Grandfatherly? You objected to that."

"Just — friendly."

"I am — just friendly. Perhaps that's what you object to."

"You're trying to be funny."

"No, I'm not," he answered with great seriousness. "I've seen a great light, that's all."

"You've seen a great light?"

"Um."

"What kind of a light?" Her voice was eager and just a trifle apprehensive.

"A light's a light. Only this happens to be a big light."

She had been leaning forward a bit, but now she sank back into the soft cushions, as though a spring in her back had given way. She did not answer for a minute or two. "You mean," she said at last, slowly, "that you don't care for me any more — as you did?"

She watched his face as arc-light after arc-light lit it for a flash. The expression on it was the same under

the tenth as under the first lamp, determined, calm, a trifle grim. "I'm not saying," he responded a half mile farther north.

They sped on, neither speaking until the rugged precipices of Fort Washington began to give way to the tamer levels of Van Cortlandt Park.

"I want to go home," said Barbara suddenly.

Tom slowed down the car at once. "Right you are," he said. "Your mother'll be glad to see you. She was hoping you'd come home early and get some sleep."

"Oh, heavens!" cried Barbara, "I suppose I'll be put to bed with admonitions and a hot water bottle. Oh, gloom!" She sat motionless in the motionless car a full minute, regarding the prospect, while Tom waited. Then abruptly she spoke. "I'm not going home. I won't be quizzed. Take me to grandma's."

"Grandma's?" queried Tom, puzzled.

"Father's mother."

"Haven't heard you speak of her for years."

"We've been at outs."

"I see."

"She lives up here somewhere. When I was a kid I used to come up twice a week or more. Fordham. That's near here. Over that way." She pointed eastwards. "Merlin Road is the street. I'll spend the night with her."

He threw in the clutch. "You're the captain," he said, and bowled under the elevated.

They found the little house in Merlin Road with some difficulty, for the night and Barbara's memory played tricks with her sense of orientation. At last, after two or three trips up and down the length of the quiet suburban street, they found it, half way between two arc lights, a dusky, shy retreat, with the only evergreens in the neighborhood screening its front porch and straw-colored rosebushes on the lawn and along the fences that bounded the diminutive estate. There was light in the first-floor win-

dows and as they stopped at the curb they saw for an instant a shadow on the window-shade for all the world like a silhouette of Eighteen-sixty — shawl, hair-cap and all.

"That's grandma," whispered Barbara.

Tom noticed an excited eagerness in her tone and was stirred by it. Who, seeing Barbara at the "Purple Cow" that afternoon, would ever have imagined that she could be thrilled by a visit to a grandmother as by an adventure? Yet Barbara was thrilled. There was the light of expectation in her eyes, as though she were about to meet her lover. Tom decided that he knew nothing at all of the ways of the human heart, particularly not when it wore the garments of woman.

"Come on in," said Barbara.

"I don't think I'd better."

"Please."

He shook his head.

"I'm afraid," she confessed.

"She won't eat you."

"I said a lot of horrid things when we fought three years ago. She may not let me come in."

"I never saw a grandmother yet who could keep a grudge three years. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll wait out here until you're safely in her arms. Will that do?"

"How will you know?"

"Open the door and shout."

"All right." She held out her hand. "Good-by, Tom. Thanks for the ride." She took a step toward the house, hesitated and turned again. "If you get over your grouch, you can call for me in the morning, if you want to. Any time around nine. Grandma has breakfast shortly after midnight."

"I'll see," he answered.

"Oh, don't put yourself out!" she retorted quickly.

"Thanks, I won't."

"You're perfectly horrid." There was a catch in her voice.

"It's a way worms have."

"What do you mean?"

He rushed the engine suddenly. "Think it over," he remarked coolly, when the tumult had subsided.

Barbara shrugged her shoulders, turned and walked quickly up the cement walk, up the three steps to the front door. It opened almost before the silver tinkling of the old-fashioned pull-bell died on the quiet air.

"Who's there?" said a gentle, musical voice. Tom heard it, wondering how Barbara could ever have been afraid of a grandmother with a voice like that. He saw a dark shadow in the open doorway and heard an excited exclamation, "Barbara!" There was no lingering resentment in that cry.

"Hello, Gran!" cried Barbara, trying hard to appear unmoved. Her quavering voice betrayed her. Tom saw the slender old lady take the slender girl in her arms, and heard the caressing exclamation, "Dear, little Barbara!"

It had evidently occurred to neither to shut the door. Tom saw that there was no need for him to stay, and he felt like an intruder staring at that scene of the prodigal's return. But he did not have the heart to break into it with a possible explosion from the exhaust pipe and the harsh clangor of a clutch sliding into gear.

Barbara's voice came to him, strangely happy. "It's all right, Tom," she was calling. "Grandma says I can stay. Good night."

He called back, "Good night, Bee," and was off, thinking of grandmothers and feeling old, for all his twenty-four years, remembering that the unique joy of going to visit a grandmother was forever behind him, buried in two graves years ago. He thought of grandmothers all the way home.

XV

IN the little house in Merlin Road, Barbara was finding some difficulty in regaining her self-assurance. She had the satisfaction, however, of observing that Madam Collingwood was having no easier time of it. That lovely old lady had two bright spots in her usually sallow cheeks.

"Take off your hat, Barbara," she said as she closed the front door on the diminishing whirr of a retreating motor. "What a dear hat it is! I do declare the little hats this year are prettier than anything that's come and gone since I've been watching the flow and ebb of fashions these sixty odd years. So much more becoming than those hideous big things that showed only one eye. I believe I could wear one of this season's hats myself."

Barbara held it up. "Try it on, Gran. Do. Grandmothers are wearing much gayer things than satin toques nowadays, you know."

Madam Collingwood held up her hand in mild protest. "No, my dear. I might be tempted. And what would your dear father say if he should look in on me to-night — as I declare he does, you know, sometimes — and should see his old mother in such a gay bonnet?"

"If people keep their sense of humor in heaven, he'd laugh," said Barbara. "I know he would, Gran."

"At the absurdity of it."

"Not at all. At the wonderful way it became you."

The old lady patted her cheek. "Dear bird," she murmured. "You can still say nice things when you want to." She laid her light transparent hand on Barbara's shoulder. "Come into my parlor, said the spider to the fly. I started a little blaze on the hearth just for the com-

panionship of it. Won't you sit in this big chair? You must be cold from your ride. And you always liked to toast yourself. You see, my dear," she added wistfully, "I haven't forgotten — the good old times."

This was the first approach either had made to the tender and happy past. Both knew that they must face it sooner or later, face its sad ending, talk it all over and out, before they could resume that sweet, broken friendship. Neither was ready for that ordeal as yet. Barbara, not daring to meet her grandmother's eyes, turned toward the fire, rubbing her hands together dreamily.

"Have you had supper, dear?" inquired the old lady after a pause.

"I had tea at five."

"I'll make you something."

Barbara jumped to her feet. "Please don't. I'm not hungry. Really. I didn't come to eat anyway."

"I'll boil you an egg. Norah's just stepped out to see a friend. I still have the Duchess, you know, and she looks more like a Duchess than ever. She's going on sixty-odd. Dear, dear. I wish Time would wear the shoes now that he wore when I was your age. But he has graduated into seven-league boots. You stay in front of the fire. I'll have that egg in a minute."

She silenced Barbara's further objections with the lightest imaginable touch on her shoulder. Barbara knew that touch of old. It was Madam Collingwood's medium of command. She sank back into the great arm-chair, suddenly overcome by the bliss of being waited on by some one who neither adored her blindly nor blindly disapproved. She heard a dish tremble on another in the kitchen, she heard the flames crackle and flutter. She saw the same friendly, old-fashioned landscapes in the old-fashioned gilt frames, the knick-knacks, each with its story, the ebony cabinet with the little mirror, the tiny bust of Shakespeare on the ancient parlor grand, the porcelain vases

delicately painted, the porcelain-topped table, carefully mended after she herself had cracked it, with its painting of Europa and the bull against a stormy background of sea and cloud. Three years! — and everything unchanged. It seemed incredible. Three years was an age. And again, three years was nothing, for here she was hearing her grandmother moving about in friendly, unobtrusive service, just as in the good old days, and she herself felt no older, for the moment.

She closed her mind to the perplexing world. The fire made her drowsy. Exquisite relaxation came to her taut nerves. Faintly she heard her grandmother approaching. "Oh, Gran," she murmured. "This is bliss." Before the old lady could cross the room with her tea and toast and egg, Barbara was asleep.

Madam Collingwood watched her. A slow smile seemed to kindle her face into a wistful glow. She nodded her head in thoughtful comprehension. "Youth," she was thinking, "youth, after all, is the most difficult time of life. Old age is lonelier and middle age is sadder and manhood or womanhood is full of sharper contrasts of joy and pain, but youth is the most difficult time. Dear, dear! If we could only be old for ten minutes before we are young for twenty years!"

She set the tray on the hearth, pulled the tea-ball from the pot, and sank down into her own particular rocker, folding her hands and watching the antics of the flames. She had a face austere in repose, with a skin like parchment, faintly seamed and mottled over the cheek-bones. Her hair was jet black and she wore it parted in the middle and brushed lightly down to an intricate web of flat braids covering her ears. There was not a gray strand in it, but the Duchess, and the Duchess only, knew that it had been growing sparse this past decade, so that the little black cap of lace and narrow velvet ribbons which had once been only a decoration was now a necessity.

She turned toward Barbara, and the look on her face was that of a mother watching over a sick child. She wondered what had happened to bring her back to the discarded refuge on Merlin Road; she wondered what had been happening these three years past. What did the young man in the automobile have to do with it all? What was Barbara's mother thinking about it? Was Barbara engaged? Was she by any chance in love with a chauffeur?

The old lady was filled with an almost overpowering curiosity. For three years not a day had passed that she had not thought of her only grandchild, wondering what she was thinking and doing, whether she was growing as she had once seemed to promise she would grow, or whether the city had stunted her, caged the gay, upsoaring bird in her, weakened her vision with meretricious dazzle? And here the girl was at last, and Christian charity forbade even the slightest stir that might wake her. Madam Collingwood was tempted by the Devil to extort a well-known squeak from her rocker, but she pressed her lips together and withstood. It was a great deal of an ordeal for Barbara slept an hour.

She returned to waking consciousness on the breath of a long, contented sigh. "I've been asleep," she murmured without turning, evidently aware without the testimony of her eyes that her grandmother was in her old, familiar chair.

Madam Collingwood forced the rocker to give its squeak, merely to get the impulse out of her system. But otherwise she did not stir.

"Perhaps you have been overdoing, my dear," she suggested gently.

Such a hint from Barbara's mother would have drawn a volley of denials, but Barbara's grandmother had always had privileges which Barbara had never granted her mother, mainly because she seemed more discriminating in

her criticism and did seem to have an almost uncanny understanding of Barbara's problems.

"I have been going some," said Barbara.

"I can remember so well when I was your age," her grandmother went on musingly. "I was *always* doing too much. And my beaux were a dreadful strain."

"Is that tray for me?" asked Barbara abruptly.

"Put it on that table, dear."

Barbara pushed back her chair and sank down on the floor beside the hearth. "I don't want a table, Gran. This is wonderful. Why, here's that same dent in the tea-ball and the same onion-pattern dishes and the same tray —" Her voice died away in reminiscent dreaming.

"We were a pair of silly girls, my dear," said the old lady quietly, "to quarrel the way we did. We should have trusted each other more. We should have trusted our friendship more. You were so changed when you came back from boarding-school that Spring three years ago, and I was ill and felt terribly old, and I must have forgotten my own youth. I am sure I must have forgotten my own youth. For when I was seventeen I was giddy and silly and bold myself, just as you were, my dear, that Spring after your first year in boarding-school. But I forgot. I must have seemed cruel and harsh."

Barbara laid her hand quickly on her grandmother's knee. "Let's forget all about that, Gran."

The old lady shook her head slowly. "You can't forget such things, my dear. You can regain peace of mind only by facing them and conquering them and so taking out their sting. We were both cruel, Barbara. We had been such good friends, you know, that we felt we had a right to be frank." She smiled, but there was pain in the smile. "We were both very frank. I don't remember what I called you, my dear, but you called me a 'hypercritical, horrid old woman.'"

"Gran! Forgive me."

Her grandmother nodded, still smiling. "I never realized till too late that you had probably just learnt in school what 'hypercritical' meant, and enjoyed using the word."

"You called me vain and selfish and light-headed," Barbara whispered, in self-defense.

"I daresay, I daresay. We *were* a pair of children. You see, all my dreams were of you, and I did want you to be big and fine. And that Spring I had an idea that I was drawing very near to the shadows. I did not expect to live more than six months, and it was a bitter grief to me that my last days seemed to be witnessing the wrecking of my dreams for you."

Barbara raised her teacup to her lips and set it down untouched, staring at the firelight.

"I don't know in what direction you have developed these three important years," the old lady went on, more softly than before. "You would not come near me, and your dear mother took your side, impulsively, I thought, without waiting to hear what I had to say. And so, for three years, I have been wondering. I have been quite sure a dozen times that the city had swallowed you, and then again I would remember the bird in you and have a happy doubt. You had great aspirations, Barbara. Do you remember?"

Barbara nodded, still staring at the flames, suddenly conscious of a lump in her throat.

"Life seems all a great volcano, doesn't it?" mused the old lady. "It breaks out here and there and souls are buried under the ashes, but it breaks out worst in the city, obscuring the light. And the explosions darken and adulterate the air for every one." She paused and there was silence as her hand sought Barbara's head, now pressed against her knee. She stroked the hair tenderly. "Has the light been obscured a bit?"

Again Barbara answered with a thoughtful nod. She felt tears rising in her eyes.

"I know so well what you must have been going through," her grandmother went on in the same quiet voice. "I have remembered often lately what I forgot when we quarreled — how difficult *I* found life when I was your age. New York was a different New York then, and a girl's place in society was fixed and there were set rules of conduct and distinctions were sharp. Life was, by so much, more easy to live. And yet it was difficult even then. Even in the late fifties some of us girls had our doubts of the justice of things, and they made us restless. There were times when every man, even my father, seemed an enemy; times when I would have given anything to become a nun. I had a dozen beaux and I remember it seemed to me at first I loved them all. They were so nice. And they were just beaux, writing verses and sending bouquets and serenading me. Imagine serenading a girl in New York nowadays. Then suddenly one of my girl friends became engaged. It was a terrible shock somehow. I hadn't thought we were so close to real life. There were times when I fought like a wild animal cornered. I think I must have done outrageous things, for my brothers lectured me and my mother and father scolded day and night."

"Did you ever lie?" asked Barbara timidly, with her eyes still fixed on the hearth where the flames were singing now from blackened logs more than half consumed.

Again the old lady stroked Barbara's hair. "Indeed, I did," she whispered. "I lied like a dragoon."

"You couldn't, Gran!"

"My dear, I was just an everyday girl, like you; with high standards, too; but I was fighting for my life. Haven't you ever been tempted?"

"I'm — different."

The old lady shook her head. "No. You are very much as I was at your age."

There was a long pause. At last Barbara broke it with a deep sigh and spoke. "Did you ever have any — any doubts at all before you married grandpa? You know — did you ever imagine — for a minute — that some one else might — do — just as well, that you might possibly — be happy — or fairly happy — with any one of two — or three?"

Madam Collingwood did not answer for a long time. Barbara thought at last that she did not intend to answer at all and felt guilty for asking a clumsy question. She turned and looked up at her grandmother's face. The firelight gave the cheeks a glow that was almost feverish and made her eyes seem darker and more full of youthful fire than she had ever seen them.

"Your grandfather was a good man," said the old lady finally. "But we were very unhappy. I let myself think and question and deliberate so long that I became bewildered. I betrayed my natural feelings by too much argument and weighing of this and that. I took your grandfather on an impulse because I was weary to death of the struggle."

"Gran!" whispered Barbara breathlessly.

"The man I should have married was a business-man from Ohio. He was uncouth, even vulgar, but I loved him. I found it out before I had been married to your grandfather a month. And I love him just the same today." Her voice had a tender melodiousness like some melancholy folk tune.

"Is he still living?" Barbara asked softly.

"No. He died long ago. He was Governor of his State before he died, one of its greatest governors. They spoke of him for President."

"Did he ever marry?"

"Yes, indeed. I correspond with his sons now and then."

"Was he happy?"

"I think he was very happy. It is only justice that, since the mistake was all mine, the loss should all have been mine, too."

They did not speak for a long time, but the old lady did not cease caressing Barbara's hair. "Dear child!" she murmured after the long silence. "Life is a good deal of a struggle underneath the surface of gayety, isn't it? It is a struggle always, first to get happiness, then to keep it; and when we do lose it at last, there is the struggle to hold the head high and the vision untainted. I am used to struggle, and I would not want to miss it now. But I remember at your age, nothing seemed so desirable as the end of striving, peace, a secure haven. That hunger was what betrayed me into my mistaken choice. Beware of the desire for peace, my bird, when there is no peace without or within."

Again a long silence. Then the voice of Barbara, faintly as though from a great distance: "Mother thinks I am just a bundle of vanity and conceit and selfishness. I suppose I do give that impression. I'd give a lot if that were the whole story, as Mother thinks it is." She uttered a sharp exclamation, too brief and bitter to be either a laugh or a sigh.

"I suppose people think I'm just a hard-hearted flirt," she went on. "I know Mother does. If she wants to think that, why, she's welcome to. I bluff it out. I'm bluffing half the time, with her and with everybody. You know how it is, Gran. People expect certain things of you and, well, you give them what they're looking for. It's a part of the game. Some people expect me to make them laugh and some expect me to flirt with them and Mother just expects to be shocked every minute. And half the time, all I want is to curl up in front of a fire like this, and have a chance to think things out. But I never have time somehow. You get into a sort of tread-mill, you know, and it's easier to keep going than to stop.

Do you remember ever having that feeling when you were my age? "

"My dear," whispered the old lady, "every word you say seems like an echo from my own youth."

"It's wonderful to have you — understand. I've been — rather lonely these three years. Mother hates me, you know."

"My dear child! Your mother adores you."

Barbara gave a snort.

"My dear!" protested the old lady mildly.

"I beg your pardon, Gran. I guess Mother's been getting on my nerves."

"Perhaps you have been getting on her nerves, too. Did you ever think of that? "

"She doesn't like me. Mother's horribly unselfish, you know. Her unselfishness almost makes me want to scream sometimes. And she does everything for me. She thinks it's her duty. It isn't because she loves me. She doesn't, I *know*." Barbara was nigh to tears.

It occurred to Madam Collingwood that Barbara's mother was not at the moment the topic best suited to soothe Barbara's jangled nerves and to clarify her vision. "Haven't you had any other close friends — girls and boys? " she asked with a keen glance alert for any betraying flush on the cheek turned to her.

Barbara frowned slightly, that was all.

("Is there a lover, or isn't there? " the old lady asked herself.)

"I have a lot of girl friends," Barbara answered at last. "Two of them are fairly intimate friends, I suppose. We go together a lot, but we're not really close. I don't tell them things. Then I've got some men friends, of course." She hesitated.

"Have you? " asked the old lady, prompting, after a silence that threatened to have no end. She was perishing with curiosity.

"Especially three," murmured Barbara, somewhat cryptically.

"Was that one of them in the automobile?" asked Madam Collingwood, leaning forward.

"Yes."

"Was that *the* one?"

"Oh, my, no! That was just Tom Paraway."

"He seemed to have a pleasant voice."

Barbara nodded slowly. "His voice is nice enough," she said.

"Who are the other two? Do you mind telling me?"

"No. I think I'm rather glad — to have a chance to talk to some one — who isn't prejudiced. One of them is a boy named Chester Howell. He's awfully nice and full of fun and very rich and he thinks that he thinks a lot of me. He's a lightweight, rather, and they say he used to drink a lot in college and have chorus-girls on a string. But they all do that."

"Not all," the old lady interposed gently at the risk of upsetting the whole story. "Your grandfather was good even as a very young man. I was always grateful for that."

"I guess men have changed then," said Barbara shortly. "There's not a boy I know that I'd trust around the corner with a chorine; except possibly Tom."

"The young man in the automobile?"

"Yes."

Madam Collingwood nodded sagely. "I see."

"Chester has the dearest mother in the world. She's German by birth, but she isn't a bit — well, you know, beery. She's read everything, but she never parades her reading, the way Mrs. Paraway does. You just feel that it's all gone into the building of a wonderful heart. She's so quiet and tender and not a bit sentimental, the way one imagines Germans. She's pro-German, of course, but she doesn't talk much about it. She lets Chester do that.

You just feel all the time that night and day, whatever she's doing, in her heart she is praying for the triumph of what she believes is the right side. I never saw such faith."

"Are you sure, my dear," remarked the old lady, "that you are not in love rather with the mother than with the son?"

"I hadn't thought of that," said Barbara seriously. "She'd make an ideal mother-in-law. And she wants so much to have me marry Chester. She's told me so herself. That's a wonderful feeling, you know. I can't help thinking of that whenever I think of Chester."

"I can understand your feeling that way. But after all, whatever the humorists say, one does marry the man and not the mother-in-law."

"I suppose so," mused Barbara as though the point were debatable. "You see, Tom's mother and father detest me. They just make me stick out quills whenever I come near them."

"Naturally, that wouldn't help matters, would it?"

"His mother's a horrible high-brow anyway, and his father's a stick. Tom might turn out to be both."

"You said there was a third?"

"Yes."

"You like him the best, don't you?"

"How did you know?"

"One generally leaves the best to the last."

"But I'm not sure he is — the best."

"The dearest — then."

"I'm not sure even about that. It's funny. He stirs me all up. He can make me so happy I seem to forget everything else in the world, and then suddenly he'll look at me or touch me in a way that'll give me the creeps. I just want to run away then and hide — sort of — sort of — ashamed. D'you know, Gran?"

"He's handsome, I suppose?"

"Wonderfully."

"Um."

"What are you thinking, Gran? You look solemn."

"Is he — fast?"

Barbara hesitated. "I heard that he was — in college. He only stayed there a short time."

"I see. And I suppose he has a great deal of money?"

"His father has millions."

"He sounds a little perilous to me, Barbara dear." The old lady made the remark timidly, not knowing how much criticism Barbara's love for this gay youth would stand.

But Barbara neither flinched nor did she show resentment. "I've thought that myself, Gran," she admitted slowly, crumpling a bit of toast absentmindedly. "Last night I was positive I wouldn't marry him or anybody else. But you know how it is. Thinks look differently at different times." She paused, then she added dreamily, "I would have gone to the ends of the earth with him this afternoon."

"Has he asked you to marry him?"

"I — think — so."

"Have you accepted him? Don't answer if you don't want to, dear. But I am so deeply interested. Have you accepted him?"

"I — don't — know." She paused again. "No, I haven't," she added emphatically. "Of course, I haven't. But some one has started the report that we're engaged."

The old lady leaned forward quickly and laid both hands about Barbara's head, still resting on her lap. "Dear bird," she cried tenderly. "Are they trying to force you to a decision? Dear bird, dear bird!"

Barbara sat bolt upright with a quick turn facing her grandmother. "I hadn't thought of that," she cried. "But that's exactly what they're trying to do, Delia and

Ruth and whoever started that rumor that Cleve and I were engaged. They're trying to coerce me."

She rose quickly to her feet and took a step or two toward the fire, resting her brow against the shelf of the mantel. "It's like a net and everybody I know and depend on — everybody but you — is pulling on the strings — Mother, Tom, Chester, Mrs. Jardine, Cleve, Ruth, Delia, and the Paraways and Mrs. Howell. They won't leave me alone — to solve my own problem. They're all trying to push me this way or that, for their own ends or to satisfy their own prejudices or just for the sake of gossip or the mushy satisfaction of seeing two more people hitched up for better or worse. They won't patch things up afterwards if they go wrong, and more than half the marriages do go wrong."

"Not more than half," protested the old lady.

"I don't mean divorce," Barbara explained, "but just dullness and emptiness, the dead level. I don't want that kind of marriage. I'd rather die now and be done with it. I want to be free and happy. I want to grow. I don't want to turn into a fat doll. I want to keep on growing — like you."

Madam Collingwood looked up and there was a glow in her eyes. Barbara's own eyes were glowing, hot. Her spirit was in that cry, though the impulse behind it had lain dormant and unexpressed in the cobwebbed attic-corners of her mind these three years and more. Barbara's mother, hearing it, would have had the happiest moment of her life.

"Keep up the fighting spirit, my dear," said her grandmother at last. "Keep that alive — always."

Barbara's brow was pressed against the mantel-shelf again as she stared down at the black and carmine of the dying fire. "I want to, Gran," she murmured. "I want to. Really. But sometimes it's hard. Harder now than it used to be. I've lost pep, somehow. Lots of people

seem to get everything they want without fighting, just by forgetting some things. You know? And ignoring others. Just by giving in. Money, social position and all that. Of course, you can say that they probably find that all that doesn't make them happy. But in lots of cases it does. They lose the fine edge, but once they've really lost it, they're just as happy without it. Happier even, sometimes. I've got the remnants of a fine edge, and it just makes me miserable."

She laughed mirthlessly. After a moment she went on: "I keep thinking, What's the use? I've lost my enthusiasm. Nobody can fight forever. Not even a man. Even in Europe now they don't go on fighting hour after hour and week after week and month after month. They rest, and throw biscuits at the enemy instead of bombs, and sing songs at each other. But I don't seem to get any rest. I'm tired. I'm tired to death. There's no more fight in me."

She raised her head with obvious difficulty, and stared with tearless unhappiness at the dim, dark painting of Lake Lucerne that hung over the mantel. It carried her back to her childhood. She had often sat before it wondering whether that white thing in the center was a snow-peak or a cloud. It occurred to her now that the artist himself did not appear to have been certain.

"You ought to go off for a bit," suggested the old lady, "away from all your beaux. Time and space are the wisest of gardeners. They weed and thin out, and give the rare flower a chance to lift its head and breathe and grow. I have my little garden here, and I have lost so much by weeding a day too late."

"But don't you see, Gran," Barbara said, "I can't go away. I can't put off things indefinitely. I have to decide now, to-day or to-morrow. That's the ghastly part of it. Cleve Winsor has to go back to Minneapolis Monday night, and I'll have to tell him then, definitely, or — or

— I'll never have another chance. You know how those things are."

"Poor dear!" murmured the old lady. "But since so much of it is a gamble, Barbara, wouldn't it be wiser to let him go without a decision now, and, since you are taking chances anyway, take a chance on his coming back for you? If he really loves you, you know —"

Barbara pondered. "Yes. That seems more reasonable. But men are funny. He might think I had just been flirting with him, and deliberately make himself forget me. He would be angry, I'm sure, for he came East just to get my answer. And I've been holding him off. I let him kiss me in the pantry last night, but when I realized what I'd done I nearly struck him. I felt as if I could have killed him. If I can't tell him definitely before he leaves on Monday, he'll never come back. I know it. And all my life I shall be thinking that I threw away my happiness, because I was spineless and couldn't make up my mind."

She was silent a full minute; then she shook herself as though to cast off a nightmare. "I've been feeling as though the demons were after me ever since he came two days ago, little red imps with prongs, shouting 'Make up your mind, make up your mind!'" She tried to laugh. "It's rather ghastly."

She turned slowly and, supporting a hand on either side of her grandmother's chair, bent over the old lady, and kissed her. Madam Collingwood's arms went round her neck and drew her close. "My bird!" she whispered.

"Would you mind if I went to bed?"

"My dear, my dear! Remember you're at home here."

"So I am. It's a wonderful feeling. Good night, Gran."

"May I — tuck you in?"

"May you?"

They went upstairs together with their arms about each

other's waists. That was at nine o'clock. The Duchess, tall, imposing, white-haired, returning from her evening out shortly after ten, heard voices as she passed the door of the guest-chamber, and wondered. She kept herself awake with a dime novel and at eleven tiptoed down one flight to spread, as her custom was, an unnecessary extra blanket over her aged mistress. Her mistress was not in bed. The same voices were still coming from the same room. At midnight, she repeated her visitation, frowning and looking mightily like Lady Macbeth as she descended the stairs.

She heard Madam Collingwood say, with a tender little laugh: "Hush! I've got to go to bed. The Duchess is after me."

But the Duchess waited in the old lady's room for fifteen minutes and the old lady did not come. She went into the corridor again at twelve-twenty, listening for the voices in the guest-chamber. The younger voice was silent now, but the older voice was humming softly and ever more softly over and over again:

"Curly locks, curly locks, wilt thou be mine?
Thou shalt not wash dishes, nor yet feed the swine;
But sit on a cushion, and sew a fine seam,
And feast upon strawberries, sugar, and cream."

"Is it the little bird that's come back?" murmured the Duchess. "I'll set some hominy on the fire. Sure it's the fatted calf she'll be wantin' to slay for the coming back of her bird."

XVI

WHEN she awoke next morning, Barbara discovered to her surprise that the day was Sunday. A church bell afar off sent that fact faintly tintinnabulating through her consciousness. The bells had a right to ring, Barbara considered dreamily, for sunshine was pouring in through the half open window, as though to celebrate the exit of the most leonine March in the memory of the oldest inhabitant. She lounged on her pillows. She heard no stir in the house, but after a half hour or so she heard a stir outside — the distant whirr of a motor, increasing rapidly; then the sound of a clutch thrown out and the fainter sound of tires sliding before the car came to a stop. Tom was growing careless. She would have to admonish him for such extravagant use of his shoes, these days of high rubber. The fact that Tom's father in all probability paid for the tires made the matter so much worse.

She drew up a very convincing case against Tom Paraway during the hour she gave to her apparelling. That was the trouble with rich men's sons, she concluded, particularly those who had never had to work with their hands: they had no idea of the value of money. Cleve Winsor *had* done manual labor, and by so much he was the safer gamble. The window of her room faced away from the street, and it was not until she went down to breakfast that, glancing out of a northern casement in the corridor, she discovered to her amazement that the automobile was not the familiar gray runabout at all, but a flaming red racer and the man in it was not Tom Paraway, but Cleve Winsor. She arrived at the breakfast table in a perturbed state of mind.

The old lady asked no questions, though Barbara knew that she could not help being aware of the presence of the automobile at her curb. She had had breakfast hours ago and insisted on waiting on Barbara herself, hovering about her like some airy wood-fay, luring a mortal to forsake the insubstantial world for the sweet substance of her spiritual domain.

It was as though the old lady felt that Barbara's eternal salvation depended on her staying only a little while longer in Merlin Road. She did not beg her to stay. Her spirit was not of the sort that could beg. She said, "I wish you could stay with me to-day," and Barbara answered, "I wish I could, Gran, but I can't." And that was all there was to it, save for the old lady's gentle service.

She lingered about after breakfast, obviously restless. Madam Collingwood saw that she had something on her mind, and sent the Duchess, who was sticking closer than a brother, kitchenwards. But if she hoped for a return of the confiding mood of the evening before she was destined to be disappointed, for Barbara had her armor on once more and moved about the rooms aimlessly, uncommunicative, unresponsive.

The old lady's heart ached for her evident perplexity.

The trouble was, that Barbara was trying to solve four insistent questions at once: Why didn't Tom appear? How had Cleve Winsor found out where she was? Had his mood changed again, since that cloud of resentment had crossed it in the "Purple Cow"? Would it be wise or not to introduce him to her grandmother?

She decided that it would not be wise. Her grandmother would disapprove; and she might allow herself to be influenced by her grandmother's disapproval. She did not want to be influenced. So that matter was decided. The other questions she could wrinkle her brows over for a century without result. She decided that two of them

could be answered only by the gentleman in the car outside. The other, first and last in her mind, she decided was a silly question, not worthy of consideration. If Tom did not care enough, etc.— why —

Barbara sped northwards at Cleve Winsor's side with the April air strangely balmy against her cheeks, and her grandmother's last whispered words ringing in her ears: "Remember, my dear, that you will never in the world find happiness by surrender. Fight, fight, and then fight. Good-by." She was glad that the old lady had given her that last spur. She felt ready for battle. The day was clear, she herself felt stronger and fresher than she had felt for months. She had slept wonderfully, and for the first time she was confident that she could cope with her dozen adversaries, drawing at the ropes of the net.

Cleve Winsor, once more wholeheartedly ardent, was doing all the talking. When he began by mentioning the "Purple Cow," Barbara admitted that explanations seemed to her in order. She said this a trifle coldly, deciding that if Cleve was about to be penitent, she might as well let him grovel a bit before she forgave. He had called up Barbara's mother on the telephone, it seemed, and bluntly asked her whether Barbara had told any one that she and himself were engaged. "'She told *me*,' said your mother," Winsor went on.

"I was bluffing," said Barbara quickly. "I just wanted to get her mad. I didn't mean —"

"That's all right," he answered, a little grandly, Barbara thought. "But say, your mother nearly bit my head off over the 'phone. I told her the engagement was out. She was nicer then and said it was all terribly humiliating, but that Mrs. Paraway had misunderstood something or other which that young Paraway had said I'd said, and tooted the glad tidings all over town."

"Mrs. Paraway!" cried Barbara. "What do you know about that?"

She frowned, trying to puzzle it out.

"Then I asked your mother where you were. I felt I just had to see you somehow to straighten things out with you after the tea-room business. I couldn't wait. I just couldn't. Your mother said you were still out. I asked her where and she said out of town. That got me mad, because you'd said you were going straight home. I thought she was just trying to put me off, and I guess I told her so pretty straight."

Barbara felt her sense of loyalty faintly stirring. For the first time she found herself taking her mother's part against Young Lochinvar. "I'm sorry if you were rude," she said calmly. "I don't like to have my mother think that my friends haven't any manners. That rather reflects on me, doesn't it?"

He agreed penitently that it did. "She hung up on me," he went on. "I tried to get her again, but the butler answered and said she was engaged. I told him I'd give him a five dollar bill the next time I saw him if he'd get your mother on the 'phone."

"You didn't!" cried Barbara, flushing.

"I did!" he retorted hotly, conscious that he had evidently committed something akin to a crime and determined to brazen it out. "And I'd have made it a hundred if he'd given me a chance. But the old fool hung up too. So I went to the house."

"Did you?" she asked apprehensively.

"Oh, don't worry," he cried harshly. "I didn't flourish a gun."

"I didn't say that I thought you would."

"I'm sorry," he went on more quietly. "Your family gets on my nerves — the whole house — your mother and your friends and your butlers — they're all so confounded easy and refined."

"A little refinement isn't a bad thing, you know," Barbara remarked, somewhat pointedly.

He answered humbly. "I know. I haven't got enough. I'm a lumberjack, I'm rough. I'm a man's man. I'm not fit for parlors." A hint of truculence crept into his voice.

"You were going to tell me what happened when you went to the house?"

"Nothing happened," he muttered gruffly. "That is, nothing serious."

"Something did happen, though?"

"Well, it wasn't my fault."

"What was it? Tell me. Please, Cleve."

"Well, that fool of a butler said your mother was out. I told him as nicely as I could that I knew she wasn't and that I intended to see her. He said there was nothing doing. So I said, all right, I'd wait. He said I couldn't wait. He had his orders. We were arguing the thing out when your mother came downstairs. I asked her where you were and she finally said you were still out burning up the roads, in that man Paraway's car, and that was all she would say. I was just going to give in and agree that she had me, when along comes your friend Tom in his bubble and joins the party.

"'Where's Barbara?' asks your mother, worried.

"'I dropped Bee off at Fordham,' he says.

"Your mother couldn't understand why you should want to stay in Fordham.

"'She's up at her grandmother's,' said Tom.

"Your mother seemed surprised.

"'Where does she live?' I ask.

"'Wouldn't you like to know?' says he, looking mad.

"'Sure I would,' I told him. 'And I'm going to. What's her name?'

"'None of your blamed business,' he says."

Barbara's face was crimson to the hair. She was biting

her lips with mortification. "What happened then?" she asked timidly, almost afraid to hear.

"Nothing happened then," he answered. "I know some things, and I don't knock a man down in the presence of ladies. I put on my hat and went out."

Barbara heaved a sigh of relief. "Well, I *am* glad."

He grunted. They were in the open country by now, with the hills of Westchester, rugged and wild, about them. "He didn't get away from me, though."

"Heavens!" cried Barbara. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that I waited for him outside and when he came down the stoop to get into his car, I got out of it and told him to tell me where he had left you."

"You didn't!"

He laughed a short, hard laugh. "Didn't I though?"

"And he told you?" The words were more sighed than spoken.

"If I was a blackguard, I suppose I'd tell you that he did and let you think he was a whining coward. But I'm square. You can't say I'm not, and he can't either. I may not be as perfumed as your butler or your mama's boys from hereabout, but I'm square. And no one can say I'm not."

His voice was sullen. Barbara saw in a flash that Cleve was ashamed of himself, and felt suddenly sorry for him, in spite of her mortification.

"I know you're square, Cleve," she said. "That's why I like you."

He did not answer, but stared ahead at the bright road, his lips working.

"What happened when you asked him where I was?" asked Barbara at last.

"He told me to go to hell." You would not say that these words were spoken. They seemed to escape furtively from between the locked jaws.

Barbara could not for the life of her take that state-

ment with due seriousness. Something within her gave a glad shout and before she knew it, her head was high and she was laughing with a silver gayety to make the stars rejoice beneath their coverlet of blue.

Winsor's face was black. "I'm glad you think it's so funny," he muttered, bending over the wheel.

She checked the irresponsible outburst, but the subsiding merriment seemed still to bubble about the edges of her words, when she spoke. "I didn't know that Tom ever swore."

"He didn't swear much, but he swore hard before I was through with him," Young Lochinvar muttered into space.

"What did you do?" she asked breathlessly, feeling no desire to laugh now.

"I knocked him down," he said.

"Cleve!" she exclaimed. "You didn't!"

"Don't tell me I didn't all the time when I tell you I did."

"You're getting rude." There was a cool note of warning in her tone.

He made a despairing gesture with one hand. "Oh, hang it, I don't want to be rude. I know I'm a roughneck, but I love you, and I don't want you to get away from me. Don't you understand? I don't suppose you do. You eastern girls are so used to your mama's-boys, you get scared when you come face to face with a real man. I suppose it wasn't refined to make a fuss at your mother's. But I wanted to find you, and it didn't make any difference to me what I said or did as long as I did find you. What's the good of being polite if you lose the one thing in the world that you want. If anything's worth having, it's worth fighting for. And I'm a fighter. I'm a fighter to the last bell."

Barbara, with heaving breast, gave him a frightened, sidelong glance. He was bending far over the wheel; his

eyes were like furnaces. He had flung aside his cap. His hair looked wild in the wind. She sank back, gasping a little, and glanced at the speedometer. It was registering fifty miles and creeping up.

"If you or your family think they've got to do with just another of those china lapdogs," he went on, "you're going to find out something. That's all I can say. You're going to find out something. I've got red blood in my veins, and I've been used to having things my own way, and I've never been balked yet, and by Jesus Christ —"

She laid her hand on his arm and leaned close to his ear. "Hadn't we better slow down a bit?"

She heard him give a cry that was like a sob, and the next instant his right arm was about her and he was pressing her to him. "Barbara!" he cried.

"Cleve! Look out! Let me go!" She tried to fight free. "The car!"

He seemed to have forgotten all about the car. It zigzagged from one side of the road to the other for a fraction of a minute. Then —

They saw the crash coming.

They seemed to have hours to contemplate its approach and probable consequences, and not a second to avert them. They both gasped and instinctively made ready to jump, but it was too late for anything except the impulse. They heard the grinding, splintering crash one moment; and the next, they were spitting and sputtering in the icy waters of one of New York's auxiliary reservoirs.

Her furs kept Barbara afloat until Winsor had shaken off his own fur coat, and could swim to where she was floundering, twenty feet away. She was dazed and trembling on the edge of consciousness and did not understand when he told her to lay her hand on his shoulder. So he dragged her shoreward as he would a dead sturgeon. He

struck bottom after two or three strokes, and carried her then, looking for all the world like a very wet muskrat. He was in his element, and he laid her down on the pebbly beach with all the proverbial tenderness of strong, brave men.

Cleve Winsor had always insisted that, if only for medical reasons, every red-blooded man should be armed with a brandy-flask. He drew one forth now. Barbara loathed the stuff and her protests did as much as the alcohol to quicken the blood again in her veins. She sat up.

"Jee-rusalem!" she cried, trying to catch her breath. "What happened?"

He looked up at the retaining wall that rose six feet above the narrow strip of pebbles. "I have an idea," he remarked, "that we hit a telegraph pole with one headlight and a stone balustrade with the other. Either ought to have killed us, but I don't feel dead. Do you?"

Barbara shuddered.

"Hurt anywhere?" he asked anxiously.

She shook her head. Then faintly, "Are you?"

"Not a scratch."

He saw her suddenly go pale and close her eyes. He thought that she was about to faint and sat down quickly beside her to support her, again pressing the flask to her lips. But she was not the fainting sort; besides, the prospect of another dose of Cleve's favorite brandy was enough to bring any young lady with the instinct of self-preservation strong within her, back to full consciousness. "Close shave," she murmured, opening her eyes once more, and gently pushing Cleve's liquid fire to a safe distance.

"Well, I *guess*," he answered. "More luck than sense. My fault, too." He smiled ruefully. "I was just telling you a minute ago that I was a roughneck. I'm always getting smashed up somehow. I guess I'm a rough diamond. That is, if you concede that I'm a diamond," he added, with an attractive, whimsical look Barbara had

not seen on his face before. "I'll admit that I'm rough."

"You're very nice," she said, after a pause, gazing out across the faintly ruffled water, "and I'm very cold," she added, shivering.

He threw his arms about her, not passionately at all, but with a pleasant suggestion of protection. But she was not ready even for that. "I think I prefer the lap-robe," she said, with a quick upward glance of her eyes, searching his, "if there's anything left of it."

He climbed the steep retaining-wall and found the car over-turned and resting as it were with one paw upon the balustrade and its nose wedged between the wall and the telegraph pole. There was not much of it to salvage. The balustrade, with its white cement not even chipped, looked like the parapet of Olympus gazing contemptuously at a defeated Titan. The laprobe lay across it, unharmed, as though Barbara had carelessly flung it there in her parabolic passage. He carried it down and wrapped her in it.

"How about it — dear?" he whispered, suddenly timid.

She gave him a quick smile, flushing. "It's wonderful," she said gratefully.

For an hour they sat there, undisturbed, for the day was young and, save for them, Westchester was as yet as free of motorists as a desert island.

They stared out over the lake, saying very little. Barbara was thinking of those other words of her grandmother's: "He was uncouth, even vulgar, but I loved him." Again the glamor of the shopping expedition of the previous afternoon seemed to descend on all creation. She felt subdued and yet exalted, uncertain in her mind whether by the remembrance of the imminence of death or the prospect of the imminence of love. Again it seemed to her that the vexing world was far away and that she was alone in a magic land with the ideal lover of her dreams. The water and the ragged hills and the roads

like ribbons winding away into fairyland — all these added their whisper to the pervasive lure. She forgot all about the dreadful scene Cleve had described, not without a touch of bravado; and then suddenly remembered that she had forgotten it, and asked carelessly, as though no wreck, no catapultic plunge into icy waters, no rescue, no hour of unmarred romance had intervened: "What did Tom do after you had knocked him down?"

"Eh? Oh! Tom?" he exclaimed. "I was dreaming. I'd forgotten all about Tom. He? Why, he got up and pitched into me. But he didn't have a ghost of a show. He went down three times."

She gasped. "He must have been plucky." She said it half to herself, shivering a little.

"He was nervy enough. But, you see, I'm steel all over. The poor devil would have had as much show against a pile driver. Feel that," he added, doubling his left arm.

Barbara felt it timidly, as a good housewife will feel a chicken in a butcher-shop. "Goodness!" she exclaimed.

He tossed his head; but she fell into musing again, wishing that Cleve Winsor wouldn't brag this way, and trying to fight off certain indignant appellants for entrance to her consciousness. She could not deceive herself about Cleve Winsor's performance with her mother and with Tom. It was ghastly. There was no other word for it. He could be so tender and thoughtful. Surely the brutality was not ingrained. It was the bringing up, the environment. She could temper it surely. With patience and love surely she could subordinate the thug to the true man.

A sudden thought chilled her. "You're sure Tom's — not — seriously hurt?"

"My, no!" he answered carelessly. "He managed to get into his car on his own feet — with the help of the refined butler."

"What happened to you?"

He laughed easily. "Me? Oh, a nice watchman copped me and took me to the station house, but the sergeant let me off for twenty-five. It cost me ten more to make the reporter who happened to be there keep the thing out of the papers." He laughed shortly. "It was worth it. But I didn't get up to see you. My clothes were a sight, and I guess I was bleeding a bit. He caught me one on the nose once. I guess he's studied boxing. He's got a bag in his bedroom."

"How do you know?" asked Barbara innocently.

He saw dangerous explanations ahead, but he dodged them in time. "He told me so," he remarked glibly.

"He was very weak as a boy. He's built himself up by plain hard work, I guess." This rather pensively from Barbara.

"I see." The rapids were past.

"You haven't told me yet how you found out where I was," Barbara remarked after a pause.

He laughed. "Oh, that was easy. I went to the Yale Club to clean up, and just got one of the telephone operators to telephone your mother to let her know that Mr. Paraway had asked his butler to tell Mrs. Collingwood he'd got home all right and would she mind telling him the street number of the house where Miss Barbara Collingwood was staying. Say! It just came over the wire like honey, number and street and name — everything I wanted."

The deception seemed to her rather cheap. "Tom thought he might come this morning," she remarked.

He laughed. "I guess Tom has a headache."

That seemed to her brutal, and she said so. He laughed again, less harshly. "I guess it's a brutal world," he said. "And only the fit survive. I'm going to see that I survive."

She saw indications of his savage mood, and shivered

a little, partly from fear, partly because she was really cold, partly to turn his thoughts into evener channels. The ruse, as much of it as was a ruse, succeeded, for he drew the robe more closely about her, suddenly all gentleness again.

"I'd like to stay out here all day," he said, "but I shouldn't wonder if I ought to take you home. The wall we came over keeps the wind off and the sun is warming up the wall, so it's snug here and you probably aren't feeling as wet as you are. But soaked clothes aren't good for anybody." He jumped to his feet and held out both hands. "Come along."

"I don't want to go," she whispered, more to the blue lake than to him. "I don't feel very wet, and when you're as nice and gentle as that you make me want to stay all day, too."

He felt a thrill of exultation at his own power, instinctively saying the word she wanted at the moment most to hear. "You must," he said. The blending of gentleness and strength made her feel that she could be his devoted slave forever. She rose, with her eyes on his, saying nothing. The robe fell from her shoulders to the ground. He picked it up and laid it about her again. They were both as in a dream. "Now — now — now," she was thinking, but he was saying to himself, "Hold your horses, old man. Hold your horses." For once he did hold his horses; and the sting of disappointment made the fires burn only the brighter within her, as he, who did know something about certain emotions of women, knew it would.

He helped her up the retaining-wall, and for a minute they stood on the parapet, staring at the wrecked car. They said nothing. There was nothing to say, except "My God!" which he finally uttered with considerable reverence. Barbara, suddenly deathly pale again, bit her lip. They started tramping westward along the road they had come. Barbara, who was vague as to distances,

thought that they were about a mile or so from Briarcliff. She turned the robe over to Winsor after a hundred yards and set off at a good three mile pace. An hour and a half brought them to Briarcliff station. She admitted cheerfully that her calculations had been off by about three miles.

Winsor secured a closed car and bundled her into it. Then he said good-by. She protested. "Oh, aren't you going along?" Her disappointment was evident.

"I have an idea I'd better save what there is to save of our wrecked schooner," he said. "At least, I'd better have it hauled to a garage. I owe the old hulk decent burial, anyway. And the man I hired her of may hold me up for less if I can show him the corpse."

She agreed reluctantly that he probably knew best. Then he paid the chauffeur, gave him the address and once more thrust his head through the open window. "I might as well tell you," he said with pretended nonchalance, "that I've decided to stay on another week."

Her heart gave a leap. "How nice!" she exclaimed, but the blood in her cheeks made up for the mildness of the words. "When did you decide?"

"On the last mile — just now."

She had no time to answer, for the chauffeur evidently thought that unless he made a start, no one would. Without a word he threw in the clutch. The car was a mile nearer New York before Barbara had recovered from the sudden discovery that the space between herself and Cleve Winsor was widening at the rate of forty miles an hour.

XVII

IT was half past one as the car stopped before the Collingwood house on West Fifty-seventh Street, and a bedraggled young lady stepped out and hurried up the stoop. A passerby, in Sunday bib and tucker, all fur and feathers, stopped in her tracks to see an apparent gutter-rat run up those stately brownstone steps as though they belonged to her; and the First Butler who condescended to answer her ring because the Second Butler was at that moment passing French peas to Mrs. Collingwood, forgot himself to the extent of a shocked exclamation.

He was a Nonconformist and a very respectable man, who had "come out of the drink" and was unspeakably proud of himself because of that fact, and consequently contemptuous of all who did not seem to him to have achieved similar victories over the flesh and the Devil. For some time he had been inwardly prophesying a dreadful future for Miss Barbara unless she began to mind her mother better. With the pious satisfaction of the successful prophet, he suddenly realized that his worst fears had been realized. It occurred to him that possibly he had better give notice. With Miss Barbara's young man starting a fight on the front stoop on Saturday night and Miss Barbara herself appearing thus wrung out on Sunday afternoon, clearly the position of First Butler in so compromising a house was no longer tenable by a man with a sensitive moral nature. Besides, if things went on this way, his career would suffer. And he was only forty-five and for some time he had been edging steadily nearer the mansions of the great. The only

difficulty was that he adored Mrs. Collingwood, as a man, for her spiritual fiber; as a butler, for her efficiency. Life was complicated, he thought, and sighed.

Barbara thought that the sigh was meant as a reproach for her, for she knew that the First Butler disapproved of her. She glanced in the hall mirror, and did not, this time, wonder at his disapproval. Her hair hung in strings, her satin hat was caked with a coat of sooty mud, her nose and chin were grimy, her clothes, always conspicuous for their flare, their something which only a French word or two can suggest, her dashing clothes were limp and spiritless. She looked a very picture of the Erring Daughter's Return. That is, all of her except her eyes. But of course the Butler, being discreet, did not venture to look into her eyes. If he had he would have seen that remorse was at the moment antipodally removed from the state in which Miss Barbara was moving. Her eyes shone with pure joy.

She ran upstairs lightly, and the First Butler commented inwardly on the depravity of the rich which runs with the feet of goats, fearing no judgment. Indeed, she feared none. Judgment Day had been postponed a week for Barbara. She had been telling herself that, all the way home from Briarcliff. The crushing weight was off her heart. Cleve Winsor was going to stay another week. The awful nightmare that she must haste, haste, haste to decide, was lifted. She could consider the whole situation leisurely now, look over her three suitors once more, singly and together, quality by quality, fault by fault; estimate chances, deliberate, find good counsel.

She stripped off her damp clothes, singing, and stepped into her bath to the tune of "Just a little love, a little ki-iss." She decided that her grandmother was all wrong in saying that there was no such thing as peace. Barbara knew that she was experiencing the concentrated essence of peace. And she luxuriated in it all the more

because she was so sure now that she had no need of that extra week. She had decided at last. But the prospect of the extra week *was* bliss. One never could be too sure. Barbara, who had reckless moments, was cautious at heart. Her father and her two grandfathers had been lawyers.

Dining below in solitary state, Mrs. Collingwood had heard Barbara run up the stairs; but she checked the impulse to follow. Her fine features seemed more like a statue's than ever. They were unmistakably sad, but there was something almost impersonally grand in their sadness. There was nothing depressing or gloomy about her. Seeing her, one had the feeling that she was some heroic knight, resting between ordeals. The metaphor had some truth behind it.

She looked up as the First Butler returned from the front hall.

"Miss Barbara," he said, quite without expression.

"Did she say she was coming in to dinner?"

"She did not, madam. I think she went upstairs to change her clothes, madam."

"Please ask Katy to take up a tray."

"Very good, madam."

That was all. Mrs. Collingwood touched the salad lightly and played for five minutes with the ice. Her heart was in her throat, it seemed, and threatened to break the narrow chamber with its beating. The First Butler decided that she lacked a feeling of responsibility, caring so little whether Miss Barbara came or went.

Mrs. Collingwood took coffee, which was unusual, in order to have an excuse to remain at the table another two or three minutes to compose this absurd heart of hers for the ordeal that confronted her. She knew exactly what it was her duty to do and to say; and she had plenty of courage. It happened that at the moment she felt utterly devoid of that strength which until recently had always been hers in abundance. Before she delivered the blow

she knew it was her duty to deliver, she wanted to be sure that she would have the strength to follow it up.

She heard Barbara singing "Take me back to Ole Virginny," as her hand touched the door-knob of Barbara's room a half hour later. Barbara was evidently happy. The light-hearted humming made Mrs. Collingwood want to weep. She knocked and entered. Barbara was sitting in a pink kimono before an electric fan that stood on her dressing table, combing her hair, wet from a recent shampoo. A disordered dinner-tray clung perilously to the edge of the crowded top. Barbara had evidently enjoyed her meal.

"Hello, Mother," she said unconcernedly, negotiating a stubborn kink without turning.

"What under the sun made you go to your grandmother's?" asked Mrs. Collingwood. "I'm glad you did. It was absurd that you didn't go back there long ago. But I haven't been able to puzzle out why you went there last night."

"I had an awfully good time," Barbara remarked casually.

Mrs. Collingwood, who had a restless way of always having to do something or other with her hands, bent down to pick up a bedraggled pile of clothes and hang them up. "Barbara!" she exclaimed. "They're sopping."

Barbara did not answer.

"My dear!" cried her mother, "what *has* happened?"

Barbara proceeded with her coiffure as calmly as though her mother had been an inquisitive French maid. After a minute she spoke. "We had an accident with the car and were thrown into a lake up near Briarcliff. That's all."

"My dear!"

"I didn't do it on purpose," her daughter responded icily.

"Was Tom hurt?"

"It wasn't Tom."

"Was it —?"

"It was."

"How did he find out where you were?"

"You told him yourself. You told a telephone operator, thinking it was Tom who wanted Grandma's street number." All this Barbara narrated very quietly as she combed her hair. The electric fan hummed on. Between them, fan and Lorelei made a maddening picture of imperturbability.

Mrs. Collingwood bit her lips. Cleve Winsor seemed compact of lies and deceits. "Did he tell you the trick he had played?" she asked.

"Of course. He was perfectly frank about it."

Mrs. Collingwood lifted her head sharply, like a noble horse straining at the snaffle. "How can you endure him?"

For the first time since her mother had entered the room, Barbara ceased her regular combing for a moment and turned slightly. "If you insist on treating him like a stage villain, he'll go and act like one. You ought to know that by this time, mother."

Mrs. Collingwood tra-la-la-ed softly to keep herself from saying something sharp in return, picked up the wet clothes and carried them into the bathroom. She returned immediately, still humming.

This time Barbara was the one who was irritated. "Honestly, Mother," she cried, "you are the most trying person —"

Mrs. Collingwood stopped in her tracks. For a moment the electric fan seemed to roar, so silent the rest of creation seemed. "Do you know what happened here last night?" asked Mrs. Collingwood.

"Yes." Barbara looked straight into her mother's eyes as she said it.

"Everything?"

"I suppose so. It was bad enough."

"He told you?"

"Yes."

"How did he excuse himself?"

"He didn't try to."

"Wasn't he utterly ashamed of himself?"

"No, I don't think he was. It's his bringing up. That's all."

"My dear!" cried Mrs. Collingwood in her vehement way. "He behaved like a perfect brute. I was ashamed, humiliated before the servants. Tom was wonderful."

"Tom?" Barbara spoke the word with an offhand, scornful inflection. "Of course Tom — would be."

"Mr. Winsor was in Tom's car when Tom came down from the stoop," Mrs. Collingwood went on, "and sprang at him as Tom was about to get in. Tom fell and the brute hit him before he could get up again."

Barbara rose suddenly to her feet. "I don't believe it!" she cried. The afternoon sunlight shone through her loose hair and set a crown of fire about her face.

"I am telling you exactly what happened."

"Cleve didn't hit Tom when he was down."

"Well, there's no use talking about the dreadful matter, Barbara. I want to forget it."

"No. Go on. I can stand it if you can."

"Well, Tom got on his feet somehow and struck Mr. Winsor so hard that his nose began to bleed. Then Mr. Winsor must have lost his temper, for he kicked Tom in the shin and tripped him and was hitting him where he lay —"

Barbara's face was white and strained. "I don't believe it. I don't believe a word of it. It was a fair fight. Cleve told me all about it. And he was square and generous to Tom, too. He didn't tell any lies about him behind his back. If this is Tom's version of the story, all I can say is — that I think it's — contemptible — absolutely contemptible." There were red blotches on her

cheeks now; and as she ceased speaking she drew in her lips so that only a straight, hard little line was visible.

Mrs. Collingwood turned to the mantel and began energetically to clear away certain ribbons and combs and little boxes and big boxes and magazines and hair-nets and slippers and rings and curls and perfume bottles and powder-jars, which did not belong among the forty odd photographs of friends and near-friends which, in frames or without, were supposed to adorn the shelf over the ornamental fireplace. After a minute her rebellious heart granted her permission to speak.

"That was not Tom's version," she said quietly. "Tom said nothing to me afterwards except that he was not badly hurt and could drive home all right. It was what I saw myself."

"You?"

"Yes. I stopped the fight."

"Heavens! If anybody had seen you! Really, Mother, you ought to move to the Bowery, where a fight isn't a real fight unless a woman's in it."

Mrs. Collingwood laughed suddenly at the glorious absurdity of the logic which condoned the vulgarity of beginning a fight and was horrified at the vulgarity of ending it. "It may have been unseemly from your point of view," she answered. "But the brute was murdering Tom and I interfered as I would interfere in any case where a mad dog was running amuck."

Barbara sniffed. "Your language is perfectly absurd."

"Will you believe now that Mr. Winsor behaved — as I told you?"

"Why should I?"

"I have told you, Barbara, that I saw everything."

Barbara shrugged her shoulders ever so slightly and sank into her chair again. But she did not start at once combing her hair. She turned off the electric fan with an

abrupt movement and then sat motionless, coolly regarding her mother from head to toe.

"You don't understand, Mother," she said at last. "You never did. You're prejudiced. You've disapproved of me ever since I came back from boarding-school. I sometimes think you hate me."

"My dear!" The cry seemed to burst as from a breaking heart, so warm and piteous and unhappy it was.

Barbara felt its tenderness; against her will, she was forced to admit its undeniable sincerity. But her voice was even harder than before when she spoke. "I know I've made you miserable. But it's not my fault. You just don't understand. You're hopelessly old-fashioned. You've talked and argued and obstructed and you've never understood that girls are different to-day than they were when you were young. They demand a bigger freedom and if it isn't given them, they'll take it of themselves, because they're ready for it and know how to use it."

"I've given you a good deal of freedom, Barbara — often, more than my conscience told me was right. I've tried not to interfere. But when it comes to your marrying a man like Cleve Winsor, I just can't keep still. I may be foolish and out of date, but I'm your mother, dear, and this man, I know, is a brute —"

"He isn't!" Barbara was on her feet once more.

"I told you what I saw."

Barbara did not answer at once. The color crept slowly over her white cheeks and the fire of a hard fighter seemed suddenly to flare up in both her eyes. "You're prejudiced," she said slowly. "You want me to marry Tom and you don't want me to marry Cleve. I think you are deliberately telling me things — that you think — will throw a bad light — on Cleve Winsor."

Again Mrs. Collingwood turned for refuge to music and

the chaotic mantelpiece. A crystal powder jar crashed on the rose-colored tiles.

"I can tell you this much," cried Barbara. "Your opposition is having exactly the opposite effect from that you intend it to have. I don't think I would ever have thought twice of marrying Cleve Winsor if it hadn't been for you. Now I probably shall marry him, and if things go wrong, you will have the satisfaction of knowing whom to blame."

"I'm not going to let you marry him," said Mrs. Collingwood quietly.

"This isn't Eighteen-fifty, Mother."

"No. But that's no reason why I should let you put your head in a noose."

"You're absolutely absurd. I wish you'd learn not to use such extravagant language. It makes you look foolish."

Mrs. Collingwood possessed patience and that quality which St. Paul calls "longsuffering," to a degree found more often in the pages of the Golden Legend than in the unromantic humdrum of modern life.

She sat down on the edge of Barbara's bed. "I know I am a disagreeable nuisance," she remarked after a long silence. "But I've got to tell you things, Barbara, as I see them, or as they come to me from outside. I am not trying to deceive you; and I don't think I am using extravagant words. I've got to call a spade a spade. I'd feel absurd trying to pretend it was a sugar-tongs, Barbara, when I knew it wasn't. I've heard some things about Mr. Winsor that I think you ought to know."

"I don't want to hear them. I won't listen to gossip about my friends."

"This isn't mere gossip."

"I don't want to hear another thing."

"You've got to. There's too much at stake."

Again, Barbara sank into her chair, opening and shutting her fists, stretching her fingers, then rubbing them along the palms, then stretching them again like restless tentacles. Her body was motionless, her face almost without expression, but her fingers continued to draw in and stretch out, draw in and stretch out, horribly like lifeless automatons.

"Mrs. Jardine telephoned this morning," Mrs. Collingwood began.

"She's a cat."

"No, she isn't, Barbara. She spoke very sweetly of you, but she said —"

"Well?"

"She said that the woman who was with her when she saw you and Mr. Winsor at the tea-room yesterday happened to know Mr. Winsor very well."

"She didn't bow."

"She had her back turned. Besides, she says that she had ceased bowing to Cleve Winsor."

"Oh, heavens! I know the kind. Puritanical prigs!"

"It happens," Mrs. Collingwood continued with no change of inflection, "that Mrs. Jardine's friend was Zinotchka Hallam, the Russian sculptor, who married that young Princeton professor last year."

"I've met her. She was at the dance after the Triangle Club play. Stunning. Wonderful jewels." Barbara was interested in spite of herself, and for a moment the fingers were still. "How did she happen to know Cleve?"

"They met in New York during the time he was at Yale." Mrs. Collingwood paused.

"Was it an affair?" asked Barbara with unflinching directness.

"All Mrs. Jardine told me was that Mrs. Hallam hoped that I knew what I was doing in allowing my daughter to marry Cleve Winsor. So I called up Mrs. Hallam."

"You *have* been busy," remarked Barbara with an ironical smile.

"Mrs. Hallam was at the Marlborough and begged me to come to see her. She didn't want to talk about such matters over the telephone, she said. I saw her after church this morning."

Again Barbara's fingers began to stretch out and draw in, with serpentine undulations.

"She was very frank and direct," Mrs. Collingwood went on. "She had had an experience of some sort with Mr. Winsor, but she did not seem to regret that particularly. She mentioned it rather casually, admitting that it was mostly her fault. She was the older and more experienced, she said, and should have known better. And she said that boys, of course, did go through such experiences and often made good husbands afterwards. I should like to have argued that out with her!"

"Did you?" asked Barbara coldly.

"No."

"That was wise, wasn't it?" The tone of her voice was as maddening as Barbara could make it.

Mrs. Collingwood did not flinch, but for a few seconds her voice was husky. Then it cleared and again rang out, unfaltering and vigorous. "She said that sin did not worry the Russian mind the way it seemed to worry the Anglo-Saxon," Mrs. Collingwood continued. "And for that reason the Russian mind seemed to her purer, more spiritual. That seemed to me perfectly absurd. I told her so."

"What did she say?"

"She laughed, and turned the conversation to Cleve Winsor again. I noticed that though she pretended to be casual about it all, she was stirred underneath. I had a feeling that raking up the matter after so many years hurt her more than she pretended. She had never spoken to any one about it, she said, except, of course, Mr. Hallam,

who knew every incident of her dreadful past, she said. She laughed as she said it. She admitted that she had been head over heels in love with Cleve Winsor. He was wonderfully attractive at eighteen, she said."

"Cradle-snatcher!" murmured Barbara.

"She called herself that, I remember. She said she never realized until afterwards that boys of eighteen in America are so much younger than boys of eighteen in Russia. They should be protected by law, she said, like girls under sixteen. She said it with that fascinating low laugh of hers, but there was a curious strain of bitterness running through it. She tried to help him to grow up, she said, to educate his feelings and perceptions, but it was hopeless."

Barbara tilted her left shoulder a little and sniffed audibly. "It would be — for a middle-aged old maid."

"She can't be more than twenty-eight or thirty now, and all that must have been six years ago."

Barbara rose and walked to the window and for a moment stared out at the bare backs of houses on Fifty-sixth Street.

"She probably talked Art," she said contemptuously.

"Only once, she said."

"Heavens, Mother! Imagine the bore she must have been! Think of trying to talk Art to an American man. She must have been crazy."

"She said that herself. She really loved him, she said, and he had many attractive qualities."

Barbara, standing beside her dressing table, with the afternoon sun bright on her hair, turned the electric fan on and then off again after a brief buzz, then on again and again off.

"I suppose he threw her over," she said at last, coldly. "She must have been a hopeless highbrow. And it's her

wounded vanity that makes her go yapping about, blackening his character now. What business is it of hers if I want to marry the man who threw her over?"

"My dear!" cried Mrs. Collingwood.

"She's just madly jealous. That's all."

"You don't understand, Barbara dear."

"Don't I?" Barbara threw back her head with an abrupt movement.

"No, my dear, you don't. It is very kind of Mrs. Hallam to want to warn me — and you. And I am sure you would realize it if you were not in an over-wrought state of mind."

"I'm not overwrought. I wish you wouldn't always make rash accusations, Mother."

"Barbara, you're perfectly foolish!"

"There you go!"

"My dear, you *must* listen to me."

"What *is* the use, Mother? We never get any nearer to each other in our talkfests. Why not agree to disagree and be done with it?"

"But don't you see, Barbara, that my conscience won't let me take a neutral position?"

"Your conscience is perfectly absurd. Anyway, I don't think your conscience is involved. It's just your prejudices which you sanctify by pretending that they are conscience."

"You know that isn't true."

Barbara passed her hand over her brow. "Oh, where are we getting to? Where did we stop?"

"We were talking of Mrs. Hallam."

"Exactly. And I think you're a perfect prude about the whole business. Every boy gets roped into some adventure like that some time or other. There are loads of women just like Mrs. Hallam, who just lie in wait for freshmen in college and dangle them on their bracelets

until the boys realize that they are being dangled, and break away. It doesn't mean anything."

"But, Barbara, Cleve Winsor did not break away. Mrs. Hallam broke it all off herself, because she discovered that all the time that Mr. Winsor was making love to her in New York, he was keeping one woman in New Haven and another somewhere else. She found out, shortly after, that he had a reputation in college of being unable to resist anything in skirts."

Barbara seemed slowly to stiffen where she stood beside the dressing-table. Only her fingers, now clasped over her chest, writhed for a moment like snakes intertwined, then they, too, became rigid. They seemed bony and blue and dead. Her face was the color of callous skin, her eyes were clear and cold as glass; and her voice when she spoke at last was lifeless and brittle.

"Perfectly absurd!" she exclaimed, but very faintly. She cleared her throat. "He hates women. He always has — until he met me." She did not seem conscious of anything unusually self-assured in that remark.

"Did he tell you that himself, Barbara?" Mrs. Collingwood's voice was tender and full of pity. Barbara was suffering. There was no question of that.

"He did," Barbara admitted. "But I heard it from other people long before I met him. That's what made him — interesting, even before I knew him. And I don't believe that story about him. It's foolish on the face of it. I wouldn't believe it if Mrs. Hallam swore on the Bible that it was true. Not with all the evidence in the world."

"Barbara, you're bluffing," said Mrs. Collingwood with cruel directness. "You know it's true."

Barbara dropped into her chair with a long-drawn wail and, twisting her body about, leaned her arms on the back, sobbing piteously. Mrs. Collingwood did not dare go near her. She would have given much for the privilege

of taking Barbara in her arms and comforting her, but she knew that any such attempt on her part would only make matters worse. The tears rose to her own eyes and poured down her cheeks. She sat motionless and gradually the tears subsided. She picked a handkerchief of Barbara's off the floor and daubed her eyes.

Barbara recovered her composure more slowly. At last, drawing a deep breath and letting it go again in an unhappy moan, she turned toward her mother. "Give me my handkerchief, please? It's on the bed, I think."

Mrs. Collingwood handed her the diminutive wet rag. Barbara sniffled, drying her tears. "I was so happy," she said at last, choking a little. "I don't see why you had to come and make me miserable."

"I don't want to make you miserable, Barbara dear. I wish you could realize that. I want to save you from yourself. Don't you see?"

"I know you mean well, Mother, but — it's my own funeral. I'm willing to bear the consequences of whatever I do. I'm not going to lie down and whine if things should go wrong. So I don't see what right you have to butt in and try to manage my affairs. Honest, I don't."

"I'm older than you, Barbara. Don't you understand? I don't think you can see consequences quite as clearly as I can."

Barbara uttered a slightly scornful exclamation, intimating that she thought her mother rather conceited.

"When I was your age," Mrs. Collingwood continued, "I probably thought as I think you do, that I could have reformed any man who loved me. But I know now that that was a sentimental notion."

"This generation is different from yours, Mother. That is the thing you never seem to be able to understand. Men realize nowadays that they've got to have more respect for women than they did, more —"

Mrs. Collingwood made an abrupt gesture. "My dear

Barbara," she cried. "You haven't the remotest notion of men or marriage. You're talking the way a bachelor talks about the bringing up of babies, full of wonderful theories and much more dangerous than a person who has never thought at all. You think you are very sophisticated and that you know more about life than I do; but actually you are just as sentimental as you can be."

Barbara shrugged her shoulders once more and smiled a slant smile of ironical superiority. Then, without another word, she turned to her dressing table, snapped on the electric fan and resumed the slow combing of her hair. The fan and the sun together made the strands shimmer like thin-flowing threads of gold.

Mrs. Collingwood rose abruptly from the bed and walked toward the door of her own room; there she turned. "What are you going to do about Mr. Winsor, Barbara?" she asked.

Thrice Barbara drew her comb through her dancing hair. "Nothing at present, Mother," she answered sweetly.

"I just wanted to know what your intentions were. Because I am going to give orders that if Mr. Winsor comes to this house he is not to be admitted."

Barbara jumped to her feet so quickly that she upset her chair. "Mother!" she cried.

"You told me he had to go back to-morrow. If I can do anything to keep you from seeing him before he goes, I intend to do it."

"You *are* old-fashioned. It's too bad we haven't got a dungeon in the house. But you'll have to do *some* guarding if you're going to keep us apart. For he's not going home to-morrow at all. He told me this morning that he'd decided to stay another week. So there! Now see what you can do."

Barbara's face was crimson and her eyes flashed. She was conscious that victory rested with her; and with mer-

ciless anger watched her mother bite her trembling lips, and close her eyes slowly and lay her hand on her mouth, and leave the room. She stood rigid even after her mother had gone.

And then, like the tinkle that brings down the curtain, the telephone bell rang. But there was still a minute of drama before the curtain dropped on the Act.

Mrs. Collingwood and Barbara each possessed an extension telephone and they reached their respective instruments at the identical moment.

"Hello!" both called sweetly.

"Is this 40402 Plaza?" asked a familiar voice.

"Hello!" cried Barbara eagerly.

"Whom do you wish to speak to?" asked Mrs. Collingwood.

"Please get off the wire, Mother," cried Barbara. "It's for me."

"Is Miss Collingwood there?"

"This is Miss Collingwood."

"Who is speaking, please?" This, a bit sternly, from Mrs. Collingwood.

"Mother, won't you *please* get off the wire? Hello, Cleve!"

"Hello, kiddo. Are you trying to josh me? You did sound just like your mother, though. You scared me for a second."

"This *is* Mrs. Collingwood, Mr. Winsor."

"Mother, get off this wire. You have no right —"

"What's that?" asked a perplexed voice in the distance. "Isn't this Barbara?"

"Of course it's me. But Mother's butting in on the wire."

"Barbara, I do not want Mr. Winsor to call you up any more, and he might as well know it."

"I'm not going to poison her, Mrs. Collingwood," said the Voice somewhat plaintively.

"I can't allow my daughter to have anything more to do with you."

"Mother, you're perfectly outrageous. Cleve! Hello, Cleve!"

"Hello!"

"Are you still at Briarcliff?"

"No. New York."

"Mr. Winsor, if you wish me to retain the slightest respect for you as a gentleman —"

"Oh, *Mother*. Cut the melodrama!"

"I've got something important to tell Barbara, Mrs. Collingwood."

"Oh, Mother, do be decent and get off the wire!"

"She needn't get off the wire, Barbara. She can listen if she wants to. May I talk for half a minute, Mrs. Collingwood?"

Mrs. Collingwood held the receiver an instant half way between her ear and the hook. Then she abruptly hung it up. From the adjoining room she heard Barbara's voice. "Go on, Cleve. Mother's off."

"I've had a telegram," said the Voice. "Father says come home. That means I've got to take the night train for Chicago."

Barbara gave a gasp. "I don't suppose — I'll — see you before you go. Will I?"

"You certainly will," he cried emphatically. "That's what I telephoned for. I've got to see you. I won't go home till I do see you."

"When does the train go?"

"I thought I'd take the eight o'clock on the New York Central."

"I see." Barbara was thinking.

"Barbara?"

"Yes?"

"You will let me see you before I go?"

"Why, of course. I tell you what. Come to supper. Six-thirty."

"Barbara!" Mrs. Collingwood was at her side. "I tell you I will not have that man in my house again!"

"Six-thirty!" Barbara repeated into the transmitter. "Good-by." She hung up the receiver and turned to her mother.

"I tell you, Barbara," cried Mrs. Collingwood. "As long as I have anything to say in this house that man is not going to cross the threshold."

"Just as you say, Mother," said Barbara, and took up her comb again.

She dropped it the instant Mrs. Collingwood had closed the door behind her, and dropped her self-assurance with it. Not a week, but — she looked at the clock on the overcrowded mantel — three hours and a half was all the time that was left her to make the Awful Decision. It seemed to her that she was slowly coagulating where she sat. Panic was upon her and she was too frightened to move. She listened to the clock ticking out like thunder the irrecoverable seconds. Fascinated, she heard the seconds go. Sixty of them made a minute, she remembered, and sixty minutes made an hour. Three and a half hours! With everything, past, present and future, to weigh and consider, three hearts to search beside her own, three possible careers to estimate, with life and death in the balance.

A spirit of frantic haste possessed her. She must do something. She must get advice somehow, somewhere. Why had Tom given no sign of himself? Perhaps he had been badly hurt, after all. He might be able to advise her. He did have such a way of seeing things without regard to his own interests. She called his house on the telephone. He was not at home. Who else? Ruth, Delia, Chester? Good heavens, no! Her grandmother? The little old

lady had no telephone, she remembered. She bundled up her hair somehow, jumped into the first thing that came to hand in her wardrobe, and rushed outdoors, like a dying mouse, gasping for air.

XVIII

TOM PARAWAY, meanwhile, had been having certain troubles, mental and physical. The latter were all the result of Young Lochinvar's vigorous way of showing gratitude for a supporting arm and a night's lodging; the former had Barbara for their axis.

He might, nevertheless, have appeared obediently at Merlin Road that Sunday morning had his physical troubles not intervened. But a cut in the back of his head, where it had struck the lowest step of Barbara Collingwood's front stoop, brought on first a violent headache and then a fever. He had stopped at a physician's on the way home, and that gentleman's solemn discourse on concussion of the brain and the hair's breadth by which Tom had escaped it, did not serve to make the weight that seemed to be crushing down his cerebrum any the lighter.

He walked home from the garage uncertainly. His father and mother were, fortunately, at the theater, so no explanations were demanded. He dragged himself up three flights and to bed, and for six hours hovered between wakefulness and sleep, in a ghastly chaos of little whirling mill-wheels too absurdly tragically minute for a harried soul that wanted nothing on earth except a little larger mill-wheel, tyrannously withheld; and enormous, dreadful, crushing, mountainous mill-wheels, rolling in endless succession out of black night. He agonized, struggling for the medium-sized wheel he knew he must have or perish; and dropped into unconsciousness somewhere between four and five in the morning, exhausted by

his fruitless endeavors. When he awoke at ten his mother was sitting at his bedside, reading the "Life of Bulwer Lytton."

He explained the bandages that swathed his head in fifty words, not feeling inclined toward elaborate exposition. Mrs. Paraway chuckled softly over the picture he sketched; and Tom admitted that she was justified. The whole matter was at bottom grotesquely funny, though it occurred to him that the humor of it had, up to that moment, been obscured to his vision by other considerations, notably the condition of his head. He tried to get up, and sank back on the pillow, feeling giddy.

Breakfast, discriminatingly ordered for the occasion by Mrs. Paraway, brought a return of strength. Mr. Paraway came in its wake with the Sunday papers and sat down to hear the wherefore of the bandages. Tom gave it again briefly, drifting, apparently quite casually, into a related subject.

"I haven't had a chance to see either of you alone," he remarked, "since Mother telephoned Mrs. Jardine and evidently one or two other ladies, telling them that Barbara was engaged to Cleve Winsor."

Mrs. Paraway twisted her mouth into a half-humorous wry smile; but Mr. Paraway laid down the illustrated supplement at which he was glancing, and frowned, puzzled. Then he looked at his wife, a little anxious.

"Mother?" he queried.

"There was a misunderstanding, of course," Tom went on. "I told you that Winsor had said he was engaged. I told you also that I suspected he was lying. He *was* lying. Barbara is not engaged to him. I think she's trying to make up her mind whether or not to take him. I think she's having a good deal of a tussle. Starting that rumor, of course, didn't simplify things for her or Mrs. Collingwood. To be perfectly frank, Mother, it seemed to me the devil of a thing to do."

Mrs. Paraway rose, shrugging her shoulders, still with that curious, twisted smile upon her lips. It had occurred to Mr. Paraway years ago that his wife would make a terrible witness to cross-examine. He recalled that thought now, nodding in affirmation, as he gazed somewhat solemnly at the open doorway, through which she had gone.

"I'm sorry, Tom," he said at last. "We all make mistakes, and Mother has evidently made a fairly substantial one. She didn't realize, of course, what she was doing, and there would be no advantage to any one in reproaching her. Apologies, either to you or Mrs. Collingwood, or the young lady, would only add embarrassment and pain to a situation which is unfortunate enough as it is."

"I don't want Mother to apologize," said Tom, with brows wrinkled below the white avenue of bandage. "And, I know, Mrs. Collingwood doesn't want it. I merely wanted Mother to know that she was doing considerable complicating in a matter that seems to those involved quite complex enough. I understand, of course, what Mother was trying to do. She was hoping, evidently, that the announcement of the engagement would make Winsor feel committed and would possibly excite Barbara to the point of accepting him at once. That would then eliminate the danger of my marrying Barbara. It happens that Winsor isn't the kind that would consider himself committed even by an oath on the Bible, and Barbara is level-headed, and I expect to marry Barbara anyway, so the nice little plot is a failure. But it gave a few people an ugly hour or two. Mrs. Collingwood knew, of course, why Mother was so anxious to have Barbara marry Winsor. Can you imagine her feelings?"

Mr. Paraway did not answer at once. He was sitting with hands folded between his kneees, regarding a distant spot on the floor.

"You are a persistent young man, Tom," he remarked at last, leaning back as though his curiosity concerning

the floor had been satisfied. "I should be sorry to lose you from the office."

"I can't meet the conditions any more to-day than I could yesterday. Of course, I have cause to be a good deal sorrier than you. I can get another job, but, needless to say, I can't get the education or the prospects in any other office that I had in yours. The munitions case opens to-morrow, I suppose?"

Mr. Paraway rose to his feet. "No," he said abruptly.

"How's that?"

"I asked for a postponement."

"You have your reasons, of course."

"The Judge thought they were adequate, though I did not give him the one actual reason that underlay my request." There was a warmth and tenderness in his voice that told all that the words withheld.

"Thanks, Dad," said Tom softly. "You make me feel like a mule, to be stubborn when you are so generous. You're hoping, I suppose, that I may change my mind about wanting to marry Barbara or that I may fail to — persuade her to marry me? I'm not going to change my mind. It's been made up too many years. And I have a strong hunch that in the end I shall convince Barbara that she wants to marry me."

Mr. Paraway stood at the bedside, looking imperiously tall and powerful. "I should consider your success the greatest tragedy that could come to you, my boy," he said in firm, even tones. They shook hands; and Mr. Paraway left the room.

Tom frowned and for some time lay motionless, staring at the ceiling. His father had made a similar remark the day before, and it had not moved him, but now the words met a nascent dread in his own heart and rang in his ears ominously. His love for Barbara did not falter, but for the first time he wondered whether they would be really happy together. For her tolerance of Cleve Winsor stuck

in his throat. The man seemed to him all that was cheap and vulgar and unstable; yet Barbara liked him, was, in fact, infatuated with him, which might mean either more or less than liking. Barbara enjoyed other things that were cheap — cheap music, cheap plays, cheap restaurants, cheap styles, cheap art, cheap literature.

How much of that was mere convention, the desire to be and do as other people, and how much was actual preference?

He had known long ago how she could lie on occasion, so the discovery of Barbara's most recent deception was not startling. Most girls lied, and nobody bothered much about it. He had always believed that Barbara's deceptions were merely a part of the social game; he had persisted in believing in the first-rate quality of the spirit beneath this second-rate exterior. She was in a difficult, perplexing position. Skillfully approached, she might, not improbably, fall into his arms from sheer weariness. And afterwards? If he was irritating to her now, when she saw him at most once a day, what would he be to her when they lived together in a six-room apartment?

Good God, what a prospect!

He rose, carrying his head gingerly as though there were a water-jar on it, dressed and walked to the garage on Ninety-fifth Street, for his car. Then he sped northwards into the hills of Westchester to think things over.

He made no attempt to find out whether Barbara was still waiting for him in Merlin Road; which, under the circumstances, was just as well.

XIX

WHILE Tom Paraway and Cleve Winsor were contending thus, not without violence, for the favor of Barbara Collingwood, that lady's third suitor was applying himself and his talents to dry goods. He did this not because he loved silks and selvages, but because his German mother, who controlled the business, had made it clear to him long ago that he would have to live on what the management of the firm decreed he was worth. The lure of a partnership on or even before his twenty-third birthday was dangled before his eyes to stimulate his lagging endeavors. He was a gay youth, a male counterpart to those gushing young ladies who could die dancing; but though he did dance the greater part of every night, he remembered the partnership. For without the partnership there could be no marriage with Barbara, and without Barbara, or the dream of her, even dancing would lose its charm.

The business was a practically independent branch of a famous Hamburg house, founded by Mrs. Howell's great-grandfather. Mr. Howell had been first its brilliant office-boy and later its still brilliant, though not wholly successful head. He, too, had had a gay streak. When he died, therefore, from an excess of thirst, early in his forties, Mrs. Howell had felt impelled personally to steady the uneasy, staggering fortunes of the Firm. She called herself the silent partner, but her use of the term must have been based on a misconception. Literally she was silent enough. Scarcely once a month she rustled into the office in the Firm's own importations and rustled out again, having said nothing more important than "Good morn-

ing." But she controlled five-eighths of the stock, and the other partners could make no move before that fine spirited head, prematurely white, had nodded thoughtfully in assent. Once, long ago, before they quite knew Clementine Howell, *geborene Küstrin*, the partners had attempted to carry through a rather risky speculation without consulting her; and the consequent earthquake had shaken houses in two continents.

Mrs. Howell knew all about Barbara, for Chester was the dear sort who must confide or perish. She had followed his courtship, step by step, since its beginning, a year or more back, rejoicing in it, because she liked Barbara and encouraging it with all the tact she possessed, because she saw in its happy culmination the only visible hope for a successful career for Chester. Barbara, she knew, was masterful and exacting, and an exacting wife was what Chester needed. Barbara would demand success and would take care that indolence were made a less attractive state for him than industry.

The very qualities which turned Mrs. Paraway against Barbara, drew Mrs. Howell toward her.

Chester had the German sense of loyalty and devotion, now centered in his mother. This kept him reasonably straight for the present, but Mrs. Howell was uncomfortably conscious of the fact that she would probably not live forever. Her obvious duty, therefore, seemed to her to find a sort of vice-president to take over the reins of government on her demise, or before. A more ideal method might have been to inculcate a set of principles in Chester's mind that would enable him to govern himself; but Chester's mind, like his father's, was not receptive to principles. So Barbara appeared to Mrs. Howell as a fresh instance of the attention of God to the minutest details of human affairs; and she determined forthwith to capture her as Chester's governor-general for life.

She was a frank, open-hearted woman, and made no

attempt to conceal her determination or even her motives for it from Barbara herself. She already thought of Barbara as her daughter-in-law and loved her as such, though she disliked and disapproved of much that Barbara said and did. Mrs. Howell was too wise and too finely conscious of the dignity demanded of a woman of her years and social position to pursue Barbara. But in one way or another she managed to keep herself and her affection active in Barbara's consciousness, in subtle ways prospering Chester's suit.

It occurred to her more than once, paradoxically, that if it weren't for Chester himself, Barbara might have been won long ago. But Chester had had a habit since childhood of stumbling over his own feet.

"*O du lieber Gott!*" said Mrs. Howell to herself with lifted brows and lifted hands and a hopeless laugh and a sigh. "*Ist das ein Junge! Ist das ein lieber Schafskopf!*"

Chester had done many foolish things in his time and Mrs. Howell had learned to be surprised at nothing, but even she had been moved to a sharp exclamation when Chester woke her out of a deep sleep at three or four in the morning, a month or so previous, to tell her in dismay and almost in tears that for no other reason than his devotion to Barbara he had that night got himself engaged to both Delia Kern and Ruth Torrey.

How the perfidious business ever came about Chester never exactly knew. There was a dinner-dance with wine with the dinner and wine with the dance, and Chester admitted that he had had three cocktails at the club to uplift his drooping soul before the dinner ever commenced. For Barbara had that day returned from Minneapolis, and Chester, who had had the foresight to meet her train in Albany, instead of the Grand Central, which had a way of being overcrowded with suitors at the end of all of Barbara's journeys, had proposed to her all the way down the

River. And her answer had had an awful ring of finality. His mother was dining out. There was no one else in whom he could confide. And as he dressed for the dinner-dance he experienced the first real suffering he had ever known. It appeared that he loved Barbara more than he himself had dreamed. He wanted to shoot himself, but wearily pulled on his party-clothes instead, knowing that Barbara was to be at the affair, and remembering something romantic and sad about a last ride together which he had once read, and which might just as well be a last dance.

The cocktails depressed instead of exhilarating him. The exhilaration came later, for Barbara was, after all, not at the party, and he bore his grief for refuge to that consoling widow whom his father had known in his time and whose name was Cliquot.

It was Chester's misfortune that, unlike Cleve Winsor, he was not a one-bottle man. His capacity, for one so young, was astounding. He showed none of the signs of intoxication, moreover; his bearing was perfect, his manners, if anything, too meticulous. He merely lost all sense of To-morrow.

In a dusky gallery, gloomily exchanging monosyllables with Ruth, who was also depressed, he discovered his hand holding Ruth's without knowing in the least how it had come to be doing that. Ruth was unresponsively acquiescent. Her hand felt frail and cosy and warm in his own. A wave of emotion swept through him. He whispered in her ear all the things he had cried to Barbara *sotto voce* in the Pullman that afternoon, and she listened dreamily, saying nothing except, "Oh, Chester!" in a voice that signified rapture, he was sure.

Some one came and bore her away to a fox-trot and a door closed in his mind.

An hour later he was saying the same things in the same place to Delia. But Delia was not unresponsive. Delia

threw her arms about his neck and kissed him as beautiful women kiss strong, red-blooded men in pictures in the art-shops. Chester would have been capable of going through the same performance with every other girl present if the evening had been long enough, but the time was too short and besides, Delia began immediately to exercise the right of possession. Chester forgot about them both in the calm pleasure of a cigarette in the dressing room, forgetting also that Delia expected him to take her home. Remembrance came horribly at the end of fifteen minutes of snow-laden March air.

If Chester had been a gay Don Juan, he might have laughed at himself and the young ladies and gone to his bed in peace. But he was no Don Juan at all. He had, for all his absurd apparent irresponsibility, an active conscience, and it plagued the very sun out of his sky during the days and weeks that ensued. His mother had no advice to offer him in his Awful Dilemma. She tried to be serious about it, and burst into laughter; she tried to laugh about it and found herself, before she knew it, giving him a lecture in German, which always meant that she was very indignant.

He went about aimlessly for days, living at a friend's club and neglecting business in order to avoid every place at which a telephone call from either pining young lady might catch him. He called on them both three days after the eventful evening, selecting an hour when he was altogether certain that they were both dancing at Sherry's.

Diplomatic relations having thus been resumed, he ventured to return to his own house and to business once more. He found altogether eleven telephone calls from Delia, three at his home, three at his club and five at the office; and none at all from Ruth. His erratic conscience thereafter felt entirely at ease concerning the former and tragically disturbed about her rival. Because he did not care whether he hurt or not the feelings of a lady as hot

on the trail of her lover as Delia, he played with her, flirted with her over the telephone, dodged her invitations, evaded her reproaches, sent her candy on Wednesdays and violets Sunday mornings.

But it was all different with Ruth.

Her silence was the most effective defense she could have made. They met, but she made no reference to a certain incident of that forever memorable party. But it seemed to him that she looked at him questioningly, puzzled, waiting for something. He did not love her at all; but he was very warm-hearted, and pity and remorse filled the place where love should have been. He sent Ruth candy and roses, with friendly little messages. And all the while hope dashed to earth had risen again in another direction, and he was sending candy likewise to Barbara Collingwood. But when he sent flowers to that lady he sent orchids. The month of March that year completely wrecked Chester Howell's bank account.

Chester found all this interesting, but rather wearing, for he more than suspected that the day of reckoning could not be indefinitely postponed. His mother heard him mutter "My God!" in his sleep and surmised without difficulty what he was dreaming about. After a fortnight, in fact, of his three-cornered courtship, the last ray of humor had faded from the situation, as far as he was concerned. The affair took on a serious look that deepened day by day. Two lovely young ladies were waiting, hour after hour, for him to do the honorable thing and follow up a declaration of love with a proposal of marriage. And all the while, the girl he really wanted to marry was going her gay way not caring a hang whether he loved her or not. It was a maddening business. Then, suddenly, came the thunderbolt, clearing the air, for out of the West came Cleve Winsor.

Chester had clear eyes and a brain somewhere behind them, and he had been in the Collingwood house no more

than fifteen minutes on the night of the disastrous dinner party chronicled in the first chapter of this story, before he was aware of its purpose. Barbara was parading her lap-dogs before her particular lion. The lion looked very self-confident. Chester decided before the dinner was beyond the soup that Ruth and Delia could get over their broken hearts as well as they might. He intended to marry Barbara.

He told his mother of the crisis and that lady listened with a thoughtful face and eyes not altogether without mirth. The possibility that Chester might marry either Ruth or Delia had filled her with uneasiness. Neither would have the slightest hold on Chester after the first year. Delia would be wildly extravagant, and, moreover, her family, also German, was altogether impossible; Ruth would bore him into a drunkard's grave. So, without appearing to regard Chester's obligations toward his two fiancées too lightly, Mrs. Howell encouraged him in his pursuit of the elusive lady of his heart. They were taking counsel in the living room, one flight up.

"You love Barbara more than you do either Ruth or Delia, don't you, Chester?" Mrs. Howell asked.

"Good God, yes," he exclaimed, jumping up from the deep chair in which he was lolling and starting to pace up and down. "I don't care a hang for either of those two wretched creatures. They could be run over on the Avenue or step on the third rail or jump from the Woolworth Tower, and I wouldn't turn a hair! I could see their bleeding corpses at my feet, and not even be sorry. I could run over them myself and never think about them again, any more than if they were chickens or h-h-h-h-hop-toads!" The last word came explosively at the end of a long stutter. It did not lose emphasis thereby. His light brown eyes were flashing and his sandy hair wildly rumpled. He was passionately in earnest.

"*Du liebes Karnickel!*" said Mrs. Howell affectionately.

He relaxed at that and a whimsical smile replaced the air of high tragedy at mouth and eyes, a sudden, blissfully irresponsible smile that somehow made his indifference to the two ladies in question more believable than his tempestuous tirade had made it.

"When *will* you grow up, Chester?" his mother asked, a little wistfully. "In Germany cousins of yours five and six years younger than you have led their companies against the enemy and been wounded and died. I wonder sometimes whether you would be capable of such heroism? You are such a happy-go-lucky little donkey —"

"My dear Mother," cried Chester with eloquence, "physical bravery is the lowest and commonest form of courage. Any professor of ethics will tell you that. I may not be leading forlorn hopes in France and Russia, but if you can show me one of my dear German cousins who could have got himself engaged to two charming young ladies, while he was in love with the third, and then refrained from going home and shooting himself, keeping his good nature instead, and not even taking to drink, I will be ready to begin to eat humble pie. As it is, aside from the initial error in judgment, I feel rather proud of myself for my tactful handling of what, after all, you must admit, has been a delicate situation."

He spoke his little speech with suavity and gestures and always the hint of mirth in the back of his flat, straw-colored eyes. He seemed to his mother extraordinarily attractive, and she wondered how Barbara could resist his gay charm, even if his face did look as though somebody had sat on it while it was still at an impressionable age.

Mrs. Howell laughed, of course. There was nothing else to do with this ridiculous youngster play-acting before her. But in a moment she was serious again.

"My dear boy," she said, "this is all very well, but if you want my advice we must stop joking and —"

"Joking!" he interrupted, flopping down into his chair again, suddenly glum. "Who's joking? I'm not. Good God, with two women pursuing me, neither of whom I want to marry, and a third, whom I really want, in danger of being carried off any minute by a thug from the Middle West, to speak of joking seems to me decidedly out of place. I never felt less like joking. I have been terribly depressed. You might as well know it now as later. I think that there is real danger that I am going into melancholia."

"There is a greater danger," answered his mother quietly, "that I shall forget your age and give you the Medicine that Always Helps. Do you remember?"

Chester twisted himself about in the deep leather chair until his back was against one arm-rest and his long legs were dangling over the other. He did remember to what his mother was referring. The term was a euphuism invented by Mrs. Howell in the days, prolonged into Chester's teens, when the slipper was used for purposes beside footwear.

"I think you are very trivial," he remarked with dignity. "My whole future is at stake and the future of your family for generations, and you insist on trivializing the discussion with jokes about my childhood."

Mrs. Howell rose from her chair beside the circular table with its softly shaded lamp, and stood, resting her left hand lightly on the table-top. Chester stared at her inquiringly, and then, without a word, straightened his body in the chair and looked up with an expression of polite attention. Mrs. Howell regarded him thoughtfully, saying nothing. He bore her quiet look as long as he could, then drew himself to his feet and approached the table.

"Now suppose we get down to business, Chester?" said Mrs. Howell with friendly firmness.

"I didn't mean to be discourteous."

"You want my help, don't you?"

"You know I do," he cried, humbly. "I adore you. There isn't another woman like you in the world."

"I want you to marry Barbara, Chester. She's a fine girl at bottom, I believe, and will make a man of you. I suppose, since she is being pursued so vigorously by this rich young man from Minneapolis, that you would like to feel that you had something to offer her, also, when you ask her to marry you. I will see what the firm can do about giving you that partnership."

"Mother!" he cried.

"You have done pretty well in business; rather better, in fact, than I expected. You will do better when you are married."

He passed his hand through his hair. "It's wonderful," he murmured. "It would be like a happy dream, if only those two creatures weren't there, those harpies —"

Mrs. Howell laughed. "But, my dear boy," she cried, "you don't know girls, if you think that you have fooled them these four weeks. Don't you think it's likely that since you let four weeks pass by without following up your first declarations, they may suspect that you did not mean them? You deserve all the agonies of conscience you are able to suffer, but I do think you can relieve your mind about those two young ladies now. They have probably forgotten all about your love-making."

He shifted uncomfortably from one foot to the other, looking miserable. "That's all right," he said dubiously, "or it would be all right if I had kept my mouth shut since that awful party."

"What have you been saying?"

"Oh, nothing much," he mumbled unhappily. "But I had to say something to save my face."

"Yes?" This rather sharply.

Chester looked unhappy and bit his nails. Then he

turned abruptly, and, walking to the fireplace, clutched the mantel-shelf and began irritably to kick the andirons.

"I *had* to say something to save my face. I couldn't drop the girls like hot potatoes and I couldn't tell them that the only reason I made love to them was that I was so drunk that I didn't know what I was doing. You know, you can't tell a girl that. At least, I can't."

"What did you tell them?"

He turned about, leaning his shoulder against the mantel and supporting himself thereby, slouching in an unhappy posture. "I didn't say much. I just intimated."

"What?"

"Oh, that the reason I was silent was because I didn't have a right to speak. Not until I had my partnership in the firm. I didn't say it. I just hinted it. And, well, I suppose I pretended somewhat that it was hard for me not to speak, and so on. I had to do something. I couldn't marry both of them, and I didn't want to marry either. So I thought the best thing would be just to let things slide along. I might die, you know. People my age do, every day. Or the girls might be bubbling together and get run into and killed."

"Chester!"

"I didn't wish it!" he cried savagely. "I just thought possibly by one chance in ten thousand they might. And if they did, it would have been too bad to have had them know anything unnecessarily and so it just seemed wise —"

"Wise!" ejaculated Mrs. Howell. "I don't think that word ought to be breathed in any connection with your handling of this miserable affair. You have behaved like a child. I am ashamed of you."

"My dear Mother," began Chester in his finest argumentative manner.

"No oratory, if you please," she suggested gently.

"I wasn't going to orate. I just wanted to point out that there's no use pretending I'm a blackguard, because

I'm not. If I were, I'd never have told you anything about the whole business. I'd have kissed the girls and made them cry, like Georgie Porgie, and you'd never have known anything about it. Instead of abusing me, I think you ought to be very grateful that you have a son who has such a sensitive conscience and tender heart that he is incapable of seeing trusting young girls suffer because of him."

He began to stride up and down. "I mean this," he went on. "I do. I suppose you think I have been having an easy time. I have not. I have suffered very much. I have suffered more than I care to say. But I do not wear my heart on my sleeve for daws to peck at. When I suffer, I suffer in silence. And I have suffered very much. I lay awake for an hour last night, thinking about everything. I think you are very unkind. You don't mean to be, but you are. I must say, after living with you for so many years, I expected a higher degree of understanding from you than you have shown me in this crisis."

He slumped savagely into the leather chair again, sitting with sullen face averted.

She had stood motionless beside the table, letting him rant to his heart's content. Her placid, rather sad face had been stern with maternal determination, but now, as imperceptibly almost as night yields to dawn, the sternness gave way to a slow-spreading wistful light. She crossed the narrow intervening space between them with a faint rustle of imported silks, and bent over him where he sat.

"You dear old idiot," she murmured. "You dear old idiot. You are a good boy, and I am grateful for that. My brother was like you at your age. Onkel Anton. And he ended as a lieutenant-general on a battlefield in Flanders. I will not give up hope for you. Come. Give me a kiss."

He leapt to his feet like the lover he was and took her in his arms and kissed her. She sighed comfortably in his embrace as though she were sixteen instead of forty-eight.

"This is all very well, my noble son," she said at last. "But we have not found out yet what we are going to do about your two fiancées."

"Lord!"

"When do you intend to speak to Barbara?"

"To-morrow!" he cried eagerly. "To-morrow afternoon. It's Sunday. She'll be home."

There was a moment of silence. "Before you speak to her," said his mother at last, slowly, "I want you to go to Ruth and Delia and tell them the truth."

"Mother!" This with undisguised horror.

"My boy, you must not let a cloud rest either on your name or on your Barbara's happiness. You must do this for me."

"Oh, but I can't. I haven't got the courage. I simply haven't. I'll faint. I'll faint dead away before I begin. You can't expect me to do anything as awful as that."

"I think I shall have to let your partnership in the firm depend upon your doing the honorable thing as a man and a gentleman."

"Oh, but my God!—"

"I am afraid, my boy, that that is my ultimatum."

He felt a cold sweat break out on his skin. "It's no use," he murmured. "I simply can't *do* it. I'd rather — go without Barbara."

Mrs. Howell frowned. Her husband had shown himself a coward once or twice, and it was like a fresh stab in an old wound to see the same weakness crop up in his son, but she merely sighed faintly and said nothing. She could act as support to Chester's judgment, but not as his spine.

Late that evening it happened that Chester, consoling himself with a highball at the club, met an acquaintance of

Mrs. Jardine. "I hear Barbara Collingwood's engaged," said this individual.

Chester stared at him. "The hell you say!"

"To a man from Minneapolis."

"Sure?"

"Positive."

Under these circumstances there was, of course, nothing for a sane, law-abiding man to do. But Chester was not wholly sane. A perfectly unreasonable conviction took possession of him that the news was false and he determined then and there to go through the fires for Brunhilde.

XX

AT three-thirty the following afternoon, Chester Howell, gorgeous in silk hat and fawn-colored gloves and cane and cutaway, went forth from his mother's house on West Eighty-sixth Street, upon his penitential journey. Almost at the identical moment Barbara was rushing frantically down her own stoop in search of counsel. It was still Sunday, April second.

A flushed and none too neat-looking maid admitted Chester to the house in the West Seventies where Delia Kern abode. Delia was at home, in the dining-room, in fact, drinking her afternoon coffee. So were her father and her mother and numberless brothers and sisters of all ages. The Kerns were German like Mrs. Howell; but with a difference. Mr. Kern had started his American career as a butcher-boy and was now head of a chain of butcher-shops that stretched from Brooklyn to the Bronx, a fabulously rich person, for a butcher, and noisy in proportion. His wife had been a servant-girl (which was the family skeleton) but she had had the wit to acquire a veneer of something resembling refinement and to send her children to fashionable boarding-schools. Delia was the oldest. Before Society was quite aware what was happening, Delia, schoolmate of Barbara Collingwood, was in it.

But Mrs. Kern had another ambition and she pursued it grimly. In the course of her husband's rise she had been snubbed unmercifully in New York, at summer resorts, on steamers, abroad, everywhere, by those other Germans who did not take their glass of beer at the *Schuetzenfest* — patricians of Bremen and Hamburg and Frankfort who

had transplanted their exquisite and ancient refinement to the New World with some pruning of the roots but no loss of fruit or leafage.

Mrs. Howell's family was so old that it could (and did) look with lifted brows at nine-tenths of the barons and counts of the Empire. They were free citizens of a sovereign city and you were led to surmise that they had had to be active through the seven hundred years of their recorded history to evade the patents of nobility which succeeding Emperors had endeavored to foist upon them. They had dawned upon Europe in the same century that contributed the Hohenzollerns, and prided themselves on the fact that they had remained merchants and left the paths of gaudy splendor to the rather less refined family that liked that sort of thing.

The Kerns were decidedly different. They were good-natured, hearty folk from Baden, with sound appetites, coarse but kindly feelings and no traditions at all except the ingrained, rough integrity and family loyalty of their race. Wealth had made them fat, but had scarcely increased their actual happiness. Papa and Mama Kern had felt infinitely more content in shirt-sleeves and dressing-jacket on some garrulous porch in Tannersville than they ever did in the physical restraints that Magnolia and Bar Harbor imposed. They were in a sense martyrs to their children, rather pathetic martyrs. More and more often as the years went by, bringing their now inescapable millions, Papa Kern would turn to Mama Kern in the privacy of their bedroom with that tender, wistful phrase, "*Weisst du noch, Alte?*" bringing back memories of things which even his coarse-grained being knew were incomparably more desirable than this palace of Midas. He took to champagne and she to diamonds; and both grew hard. The Devil took a fancy to their sons.

The family, young and old, were chattering a terrible mixture of German and English as Chester, with quivering

knees, deposited his hat and coat on the rack and crossed the parlor to the dining-room. Mr. Kern was the first to greet him with the pleasant *Grüss Gott!* of his youth in the Black Forest, slapping him on the back and making no attempt to conceal the fact that he felt honored and delighted. Chester flushed, for he saw Delia bite her lip and look uncomfortable. Delia was ashamed of her family. She had nothing to say as they shook hands, which was unusual with Delia; and Chester's spirits reached their nadir.

"Sit down by me, Mr. Howell," cried Mrs. Kern in her shrill voice. "We have fresh *Butterkuchen.* Take some. Here. And *Apfeltorte.* No! Not such a small piece. Papa, pass the *heisse Milch.* The young man is hungry. A young man must eat. Henriette, see that Mr. Howell eats."

No one responded to the name of Henriette, and Chester was conscious of an awkward silence.

"*Mein Gott!*" cried Mrs. Kern suddenly. "I always forget. Delia, see that Mr. Howell eats."

Chester drowned an incipient grin in his coffee-cup. He had once heard it rumored that the name of Delia had been one of the few acquisitions Miss Kern had made at the fashionable boarding school. He had always thought the tale a malicious falsehood. Henriette somehow sounded more fitting, but Delia was certainly more stylish.

The family dispersed like morning mist at a signal from Mrs. Kern, fifteen minutes later, leaving Delia, (once Henriette), in sole possession of the parlor floor and of Chester.

Delia moved restlessly about the room, straightening out a knick-knack here or a vase there, striking a note or two on the upright piano, smelling a rose, fingering a book. Delia had absorbed certain notions concerning taste from Barbara and Ruth and had converted the par-

lor from walnut and shrieking satins to mahogany and old rose silks, Oriental rugs and oil paintings. The paintings were better than the crayon family portraits they supplanted, but that was about all one could say about them, unless it were to mention that the frames were considerably worse, being gilt and four inches deep.

"You've never seen the family in a bunch before, have you?" remarked Delia, striking, as it happened, the one note on the piano that buzzed. Chester had a sensitive ear and cringed at the harsh discordancy.

"No," he answered.

"Papa is awfully good," she went on. "But, of course, he hasn't been in real society. Nor Mama either. But they'd do anything for anybody in trouble. Papa is always giving away money, and he doesn't give it just to get his name in the paper either. He likes to help people."

She said it, still standing by the keyboard, looking down and tapping at intervals the note that buzzed. She was evidently quite unconscious of the fact that it did buzz. Chester understood. Delia was ashamed of the manners of her father and mother, but at bottom she was loyal; and she was suffering. Soft-hearted idiot that he was, he felt like taking her in his arms, in mere pity.

Silence fell on them both and gripped them. Delia tapped, at intervals, the note that buzzed, waiting; and Chester thought of the ordeal ahead of him. He had firmly expected that Delia would take possession of him in the brazen way she had shown at times, assuming so much, that heartless frankness would appear almost as a duty to be cheerfully exercised. Here she was, almost as shrinking a violet as Ruth. He had planned to confess his transgression lightly, making a merry jest of it; but merry jests, in the presence of that infernal, buzzing, middle C, were out of the question. He jumped to his feet suddenly and began pacing up and down the room.

"What's the matter, Chester?" she asked. There was

a strange warmth in her voice, that made him catch his breath. He could not make himself realize that this was frivolous, empty-headed Delia.

Buzz! went the note.

"Have you got anything on your mind?" she asked after a long pause. Again he felt, more poignantly even than before, the tenderness of her appeal; and up and down his spine ran a sensation not altogether unpleasant.

Buzz! went the note.

He shivered, thrusting his hand through his hair. She was standing against the light, graceful, with head bent. The merciful twilight in the room hid the unhappy truth that Delia's eyes were of the kind called bulging, and obliterated the promise of plumpness, held unfulfilled hitherto only by grim fasting. She was obviously waiting for him to propose.

For the first time Chester was conscious of the responsibility of adulthood. He had kissed innumerable girls, and nothing had come of it, because he had been a boy, and the girls knew he was only a boy. It startled him to realize he was a boy no longer, that he possessed a man's capabilities of giving immeasurable happiness and illimitable pain. Yet, withal, he was a child, for he felt the tears come to his eyes.

Buzz! went the note.

"*Mein Gott, Henriette!*" came a gruff voice from upstairs. "*Sind doch wahrhaftig seiner hundert Noten auf dem Piano. Dass du halt gerade immer nur eben die eine Bum-note schlagen musst!*"

Delia shut the piano softly. "You're awfully quiet," she said.

"Am I?" he grumbled.

"Are you — afraid of me?"

He felt a cold sweat break out on his forehead, seeing in a flash that Delia had taken the offensive. He countered with a sudden burst of meaningless chatter that

broke off as suddenly as it began and left them exactly where they were before.

"You weren't so shy — that night at the Wilkenses," she went on.

"I wasn't so sober either," he answered quickly.

He heard her take a sharp breath. "Weren't you sober — that night?"

"I should say not!"

He heard her say "Oh!" very faintly, and cried in despair to his soul, asking whether he could possibly have let the truth come out more clumsily or brutally.

"Didn't you mean — anything at all?" she asked in a voice so tragically plaintive that he felt impelled for an instant to lie and tell her he did love her; and take the consequences. But he knew too well that he would not be able to abide Delia Kern even for a week, not to speak of a life-time.

"I've been a brute," he said. "And I thought I'd rather have you find it out from me than — just to find it out."

She laughed harshly. "My, my! Aren't we noble?"

"I didn't want to hurt you, Delia," he cried with impulsive earnestness. "I swear I didn't. I was a fool all the way through. I was a fool at the party and a fool afterwards, and I made matters worse just because I didn't want to hurt your feelings. Don't you see? I like you a lot, Delia. But I know I wouldn't make any kind of a husband, and — and — oh, if I'd thought you really, honestly cared, I'd have — shot myself. I'll do it now if it'll make you any happier. I really will. I feel just like doing it."

But at that point in the tragi-comedy, Delia's origins began to make themselves apparent. "You low, contemptible — masher!" Delia cried. "You low, horrid —"

He rose to the occasion with a tact and insight one

would not have expected of him. "You don't mean that," he said quietly. "Because it isn't true, and you know it. I'm an awful ass, but I'm not a scoundrel. I'm infernally sorry, and I want you to forgive me." He held out his hand.

"Forgive you?" she cried. "I should say not. I'm going to tell Barbara all about you. You hear? Barbara! That'll finish you with her, anyway."

"I don't care whom you tell," he answered with that new dignity that seemed suddenly to have come upon him. "I deserve to have you tell everybody. But that's no reason why we shouldn't be friends, is it?"

He smiled and his smile broadened into his familiar, appealing, ingratiating grin. She looked up, and reluctantly gave him her hand.

But she burst wildly into tears when he had gone, bringing the family about her from all parts of the house.

Chester crossed the Park at Seventy-second Street. Ruth and her father lived in an apartment on Park Avenue near Sixty-eighth Street and to walk was simpler than to take three trolleys; besides, he was glad for the recuperative effect of fresh air. The sky was clouded over now; the balminess of the morning had been driven westward by a damp wind from the ocean, promising a belated equinoctial; and the chill dusk already lay darkly under the bare elms of the Mall, making Shakespeare and Fitz-Green Halleck look homeless and ill-used. A goat bleated faintly somewhere.

Chester saw no reason for being particularly proud of himself for his performance at the Kerns'. He had planned the scene differently. He had rather thought, in fact, that that particular half of his ordeal might be more amusing than tragic. The interview with Delia had proved anything but amusing. A verse from St. Paul, which had been made familiar to him by reiteration in

the chapel at boarding-school, leaped into the forefront of his consciousness: "When I was a child I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things." It seemed to him that he had suddenly become a man, with a man's shame for the boy's irresponsible blunderings. Bits of wise counsel from his mother and from one or two masters at the School and from a great blazing torch of a woman who had illuminated the dark places for generations of boys there, occurred to him, seeming suddenly unexpectedly sensible. He strode eastward, conscious of an apprehension at his approaching call on Ruth, quite different from the mere dread of an infernally disagreeable duty, which he had had an hour or more ago on approaching the house of the Kerns. He had learnt the appalling fact that people considered him to have arrived at an age at which he was expected to know what he was about. The discovery appalled him. He had a lively conscience, and was always suffering remorse for some misdeed or other; but it was a boy's remorse and he never took it entirely seriously himself. Somehow it had never occurred to him that actions not necessarily evil, blunders, indiscretions, thoughtless bits of impulse, could have lifelong and tragic consequences for himself and others quite without number. He wondered suddenly whether he had not been wrong in correcting Delia in her estimate of him. Perhaps he *was* a scoundrel. The thought seemed to sink like a red-hot iron into his flesh; and his knees were shaking as the elevator at last shot him up six flights to the Torrey apartment. But it never occurred to him to turn back. He was possibly no coward after all.

Ruth was at home and alone, looking more flower-like than ever in chestnut silks of a gossamer lightness. She had the doe's timid grace in every movement; one half expected her any instant to lift her head abruptly, scenting danger, and turn and leap crashing away through the

underbrush. She was paler than usual, Chester thought. She was not strong and had a way of looking fagged after only slight exertion. A mere thought could exhaust her more completely than a ten-mile walk could exhaust Delia or Barbara. A delicate, lovely creature, thought Chester, and here he was coming to tell her that his love-making had all been a sham, and he begged to be excused!

They had tea, Chester, in spite of Mrs. Kern's coffee and *Butterkuchen* and *Apfeltorte,* feeling grateful for the delicate sustenance Ruth offered, seeing bad times ahead. They talked of plays and books and people, timidly, with intervals of nerve-racking silence. If it was difficult to begin his confession in the case of Delia, it was heart-breakingly difficult to commence with Ruth. Ever since the Awful Evening, his real qualms had centered about Ruth. Delia was a hardy perennial whom no frost could permanently injure, but Ruth was a hothouse lily and one rough gust might break her. Silence followed silence, interrupted only by monosyllables. He saw her bosom rise and fall quickly. Then suddenly she stood up and went to the window, drawing the curtain aside and looking out.

"It's pouring," she remarked.

"Jerusalem!" he cried. "What will become of my silk hat?"

She did not answer that vital question.

"Chester," she said suddenly in a low, vibrant voice, clutching the edge of the lace curtain and crumpling it in her fingers. "I've an awfully bad conscience about you. Really."

"You!"

"I've behaved abominably toward you. I've been wanting to confess for a month but I simply haven't had the courage."

"Confess?" he cried incredulously.

"You don't know how ashamed of myself I am. I'm a

coward or I would have straightened things out long ago before I had let you go on for a month giving me things and being — kind to me when I didn't deserve it."

Chester frowned, utterly at sea.

"I was horribly blue that night at the Wilkenses," she went on. "And I let you think that — I cared for you. It was dreadful of me. I never imagined that I could be so — wicked — as to let a man — kiss me, whom I didn't love —"

"You — oh! —"

"I did let you kiss me, Chester, and I think I must have let you think that I cared for you very much. Of course, you would think so. But I don't. It's a terrible confession to have to make. It's kept me awake nights worrying. I don't know what you'll think of me. I like you ever so much, Chester. You're a perfect dear. You're one of the nicest boys I know. But I don't love you. And I know that I never shall — love you. There! It's out, and I feel better. Will you forgive me?"

Chester's heart was like an organ, pealing hallelujahs through his being. It was all too good to be true. He sat speechless, looking serious. He felt like a condemned man unexpectedly reprieved, still too surprised and stirred to speak. It occurred to him that it would not be the part of gallantry to undeceive her.

"Of course, if that is how you feel —" he began, trying to look depressed.

"It is, Chester. I'm so sorry, but it would be wicked to pretend to feelings that I don't possess, wouldn't it?" She was so earnest and so distressed that it seemed to Chester brutal rather than gallant to keep the wonderful truth to himself.

"Suppose — I should tell you — that I came here — to make just the same sort of confession?" he remarked tentatively.

"You didn't!" she cried joyfully.

"Cross my heart!"

"You blessed, blessed boy," she murmured. Then, with a deep sigh of relief, "I'm so glad you told me."

"Shake!"

They shook hands with feeling. "You don't know how wonderful it is to have one's sins forgiven," said Ruth.

They each had a fresh cup of tea on the strength of it, and before ten minutes were over Chester (who, as before said, was an inveterate confider) was pouring into Ruth's eager ears the tale of his love for Barbara Collingwood. It seemed to him that Ruth was wonderfully sympathetic. She did not tell him why she was so eager that he, rather than Tom Paraway, should marry Barbara. Altogether, however, they had an extremely happy time of it.

But when the door closed on Chester at last, Ruth walked slowly and thoughtfully and apparently not very happily toward the window again. The rain drove tempestuously against the pane and far below swept in sheets against tilted umbrellas and along shining automobile tops. It occurred to her how pleasant life might have been if, instead of this futile moth-for-the-star longing of hers for Tom Paraway, she had fallen in love with nice Chester Howell and he with her. It happened that outside the door, waiting for the elevator, Chester Howell was thinking practically the same thing.

Unfortunately, the instinct of the moth for the candle is not easily eradicable; and Chester decided to call upon Barbara immediately after supper.

XXI

BARBARA took a taxi to Fordham, which was expensive but convenient. Her mind was in a whirl, confronted as it was by the demand for the almost instant solution of life's most perplexing problem. It was not prepared for such an ordeal. She was sophisticated enough; as Tom had remarked, she knew a lot. But the scattered facts which she knew bore about the same relation to wisdom that single tomatoes on the vine bear to chili sauce.

Mrs. Collingwood was one of the great majority who find it easier to *do* than to *teach*. She had an idea that she always allowed Barbara to work out her own problems, but actually she did nothing of the kind. In ways, simple or subtle, she advised, she could not help advising, being clear-sighted herself, with definite principles to guide her.

Barbara had very few principles; her only potent guide being a certain instinctive reaching out for freedom of body and mind and spirit; and that guide was asleep half the time. She was consequently easily influenced by other people's opinions and judgments, easily confused. If circumstances had happened to bring her into intimacy with the taxi-driver that afternoon, and she had put a certain hypothetical question to him, and he had advised her to murder her mother and marry all three suitors, she would probably not have taken the advice, but she would have rejected it for reasons of the conventions rather than basic principles.

Her grandmother was at home, as Barbara was confident she would be, for Madam Collingwood never did go

out, preferring to take her news of the changing world from the Duchess, who was an inveterate gadder.

"My dear, my dear!" she murmured. "What a joy!"

"I've come for advice, Gran," Barbara cried, breathlessly. "Will you give me advice?"

"That depends, my dear," said the old lady. "I am growing so wise with the years that I generally keep my wisdom to myself. We shall see. May I take off your hat? Another one! And prettier than the other. How much was it?"

"I wouldn't dare tell you, Gran."

"Shall we take it off?"

"No. I've got to go right back." She strode with quick, firm steps to the fireplace and turned. "I'm in an awful pickle. Cleve Winsor's father has telegraphed for him. He has to go back to-night. He's coming for his final answer at — six-thirty. I'm up against it. I — I don't — Gran, I haven't the least idea what to do."

"Do you love him, dear?"

"Yes. I love him very much. At least, I think — I do. Sometimes I seem almost to — worship him. Can you imagine that, Gran?"

Madam Collingwood sank slowly into her accustomed rocker and folded her hands. "Yes, my dear. Women do feel that way about men sometimes."

"But that isn't all. Sometimes I don't like him at all. Sometimes he makes me squirm. Do you know what I mean? The way you feel when you've seen a spider and brushed him out of the window and know he's gone, and yet seem to feel him crawling down your neck. You know?" She spoke earnestly, but Madam Collingwood could not keep herself from noting how charming and trim and clean-washed she looked with her perfect skin, flushed, and her bright, eager eyes under the fascinating little hat. "Those times I just seem to loathe him. And then

again — he's awfully sweet, Gran, with a lot of feeling for his family, which is a good sign, don't you think? He's big and sometimes he's a little rough, like the man you cared for, you know."

"Oh, my dear, don't let my experience mean anything to you, either as guide or warning."

"I can't help remembering what you said of your friend," said Barbara, quoting softly, "'He was uncouth, even vulgar, but I loved him.'" She turned away quickly, staring up at the mysterious painting of Lake Lucerne. "I can't help thinking of that."

"A rough exterior should work neither for nor against a man. It is the heart that counts."

Barbara turned again slowly. "Of course," she said, a little dubiously. "But we can't ever know anything about another person's heart. Not really. Rough people have a way of having soft hearts, and smooth people have a way of having hard hearts. You can't tell. Everything's an awful gamble, isn't it? Life, I mean. And marriage especially. When I was at school some of us girls went through Sing Sing once. You know, the prison. And — do you know? — life sometimes seems like those dark corridors with people in cells on both sides, and when you marry, you marry a cell together with the unseen convict that's inside it."

"Oh, my bird!" cried the old lady, leaning forward impulsively and taking Barbara's hand. "You're morbid, my dear. You mustn't think such thoughts." Her voice was suddenly tremulous. "Life is beautiful, my child. There are endless, wonderful surprises in it. And if your thoughts are right, there are no cells, but an ever-widening freedom, as your understanding deepens, and your charity, and you learn that living is not a matter of flesh and blood and time and chance, but just of thoughts, each thought stronger than those brave men who are killing each other in Europe, stronger to kill or to heal or to

protect empires or democracies. The world will find it out some day. And then everybody will be free."

Again Barbara turned to the lake of Lucerne. "I wish you could tell me what to do. I'm just up in the air. If I could see things through my own eyes I might be able to come to some decision. But I can't. I told you last night how it is. Everybody seems to be butting in. This morning a person I scarcely ever heard of before upset everything by telling Mother awful things about Cleve. And now one part of me wants to go and marry him to spite Mother and defend him and help him. You know? And the other part of me wants to run away from him and hide. It's the limit."

The old lady did not answer, sitting motionless with eyes fixed on the alabaster-like hands in her lap. With her right hand she turned her wedding-ring pensively on its finger. The silence was broken by a clock somewhere striking once.

"What's that?" cried Barbara, in a panic.

"It must be half-past four."

There was a hunted, half-demented look in Barbara's eyes as she crossed the room quickly and picked up her gloves where she had dropped them on the ancient piano. She started to draw them on and suddenly desisted, letting the fingers hang limply.

"I want — to marry — him," she said with difficulty. "There are times when I feel as though I should die if I didn't. And yet — there's something inside me — that seems to tell me — to look out. It may be just a freak of cowardice. But there it is. Oh, Gran, can't you tell me what to do?"

Madam Collingwood rose, and it seemed to Barbara that as she came toward her, her eyes were like deep wells at night. "If I could, my dear, if I could!" murmured the old lady. "But you said yourself, you know, that you might be able to come to a clear decision if there were

not so many people trying to guide you or force you this way or that. You are quite right. It is the nobler side of you that said that. It is the weaker side that wants another to solve your problems for you. Good-by, dear. I won't keep you. You are a good fighter. Head high and never surrender!"

They kissed, both conscious that a decisive battle would have been won or lost when they met again.

It was beginning to rain as Barbara closed the door of the little house on Merlin Road, but she jeopardized the second hat that day running across the yard to the taxi, rather than lose the minute or two it would cost to ring the bell and borrow an umbrella. She told the driver her address, adding "Rush!" but a long skid on the swimming pavement scarce a half dozen blocks south, brought them abruptly face to face with a drenched and indignant policeman who jumped on the running board and gruffly ordered the chauffeur to drive to a police station in the neighborhood. The chauffeur prepared to turn, but Barbara knocked indignantly on the window.

"You shan't turn around," she cried hotly. "You've got to take me home." Then to the policeman, "I've got to go home. How will this do?" She took a bill out of her purse. It happened to be one for twenty dollars. The man's eyes looked wistful; but he shook his head.

"I've got to get home," she cried desperately. "Don't you see? There's a man that's —"

"Oh, well, run along," muttered the officer. Then to the chauffeur, "I've got your number. Come in the morning. Beat it."

"Oh, thanks!" cried Barbara with feeling.

Once more they were speeding southward. It occurred to her now for the first time that she did not know why she was so madly anxious to get home. Cleve was not coming before six-thirty. It was barely five. She was

rushing because there was so little time left to think it all out to a conclusion, and because there *was* so little time, she did not dare begin. She wanted advice, advice. She wanted some one to tell her what to do. Again she beat against the glass behind the chauffeur's back. "Stop at the next telephone!" she cried.

They drove on through the wet dark an interminable distance, and Barbara was about to beat upon the window once more when the car swerved sharply to the right and stopped before a drug store. Once more she imperilled the expensive hat.

She called up Tom Paraway. He was not at home but was expected any minute, she was informed by a cultured voice.

Barbara hung up the receiver sharply and dashed back into the car. "Stop at another drug store in the Eighties," she ordered, slamming the door. They sped southward again.

In the Eighties Barbara once more encountered Mrs. Paraway's musical tones. The Paraway household was evidently still in a state of expectancy with regard to Tom. He had been away all day, it appeared, and Mrs. Paraway was beginning to worry because he had been extremely ill the night before as a result of a fall. "Isn't this Barbara Collingwood?" she asked sweetly.

Barbara did not answer, but hung up the receiver, sitting rigid in the booth an instant, asking herself to whom now she should turn. She felt herself trembling, and over her cheekbones she was conscious of the glow of fever. She opened the door of the booth to get a breath of air and closed it again quickly to keep from the clerk the interesting fact that she was sobbing.

An inspiration brought control and new hope. Who could give her better advice than Zinotchka Hallam? She dismissed the thought as absurd, and left the drug store with the firm intention of telling the driver to take her

home, but the only word she uttered as she dashed out of the store again into the taxicab, was "Marlborough." And again, they were off.

Mrs. Hallam was in her room, and begged to have Miss Collingwood brought up. The sudden upward rush of the elevator in the hands of an adventurous youth of thirteen or fourteen nearly snuffed out the trembling flame of Barbara's consciousness. Her teeth began to chatter, but she stilled them. The elevator stopped suddenly dead and Barbara clutched her bosom, swallowing hard.

Half a minute later she was saying "How do you do?" with apparent composure to a tall, foreign-looking lady who looked like the photographs of the Empress of Austria, with a tower of wonderful hair on her head and deep eyes, jet black, dreamy and sad. Her age might have been anything between twenty-five and forty-five. Barbara admitted reluctantly that thirty was a fair estimate.

She was very Russian, and Barbara, looking for shortcomings, was not slow to perceive that Mrs. Hallam wished no one to forget for an instant who or whence she was. She wore an N in diamonds, surmounted by a crown, at her throat. That was the gift of the Czar, sent her after a visit to her studio in the days when Petrograd was still St. Petersburg. She wore heavy ear-rings of steel-colored pearls, and chains on chains of pearls hung about her neck and down amid the folds of her steel-colored, loose-flowing gown. She moved with extraordinary dignity and grace. Barbara was enormously impressed, feeling, of all things, dowdy and bourgeois. She might have felt less unworthy had she known that Zinotchka Hallam was the daughter of a Lithuanian peasant-girl who had strayed too close to a grand-ducal hunting party. But she did not know it, and felt insignificant and a little helpless in the presence of obvious aristocracy.

"You are very brave to come to see me," Mrs. Hallam remarked in her melodious, foreign voice.

Barbara thought that that was a rather conceited remark to make, and felt more confident, but said nothing.

"It is always brave," the lady went on, "to face the truth. I don't think a Russian girl would be brave, that way. A Russian girl would either throw over Cleve without another word or marry him in spite of facts. She would not go to the hateful bearer of bad tidings, to investigate. Would you think it impertinent of me if I told you that I admired you for your courage in coming here?" Her voice was measured and friendly and patronizing.

"I wanted to make sure that the story was true," said Barbara, a little sharply, for she did not like to be patronized.

"Quite true, my dear." It struck Barbara that the words were not easily spoken. Mrs. Hallam was fingering her pearls. There was a longer silence than ladies, proud of their *savoir-faire*, generally allow.

Barbara rose suddenly to go. How utterly absurd had been her impulse to come here. She had not come, as Mrs. Hallam imagined, to find out whether or not the story was true. She had known from the first that it was. She had come to ask for advice from the one person in New York who knew Cleve Winsor. It seemed to her she must have been slightly crazy. She felt dizzy and put out her hand to steady herself against a chair.

The next thing she knew she was lying on the sofa and the most melodious of birds was twittering his morning song in her ears. It took her quite a while to discover that the bird was none other than Mrs. Hallam, murmuring incessantly tender, meaningless things such as one would utter to a child who finds his comfort in the tone rather than the word. Barbara opened her eyes. "Oh, dear!" she cried softly, conscious that something awful must have happened without knowing what it was.

"Don't try to speak just yet, little flower, little flower," murmured the Russian lady.

"What happened?"

"You fainted, my dear."

"What time is it?" Barbara asked this question in sudden panic.

Zinotchka Hallam drew the most diminutive of watches from the voluminous steel-gray folds of her dress. It was like drawing a glittering minnow from the ocean.

"Ten minutes to six."

"Thank you. I'm so sorry to have been a nuisance. I was just going. I think I'll have to go now."

The Russian laid a feather-light hand on her shoulder. "Not yet, not quite yet."

"I've got to go home. Really. There's — some one coming. I've got to dress."

"Just a minute, my dear flower. I feel as though I could not let you go. I'm not old enough to be your mother, but I feel as though I were. Is it — Cleve — who is coming to-night?"

Barbara turned her head slightly on the satin pillow and gazed with what seemed to the other woman uncannily cold inquisitiveness into Mrs. Hallam's eyes. Mrs. Hallam understood that that glance meant that it was none of her business whether it was Cleve who was coming or not. But Barbara evidently found the sad eyes of the Russian disarming, for her own eyes seemed to darken slowly, losing their hardness. Slowly she turned away her head again.

"You came here really to see what kind of creature this Russian adventuress was, didn't you?" said Mrs. Hallam. "It would have been a comfort to you to find her horrid and coarse and seductive, for every blot of that sort would have been an excuse for — Cleve, or at least a palliation. But, you see, I am none of those things, though I have a thousand other faults which I carefully hide from the people on whom I want to make an impression. I did not lay any traps for — Cleve. We fell in

love quite without knowing what was happening. But he did not play fair. I found that I was one of three."

"Are you sure?"

"My dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Hallam. "A Russian woman will take a lover on faith, but not a rival. I went to see them both. They were nice things in their way, and quite frank. I think they enjoyed being frank."

"I suppose they would," remarked Barbara thoughtfully.

"But that was not the worst," went on Mrs. Hallam, with a sudden exclamation of comic despair that held its note of bitterness. "I could have shared him with one, even with two. Women can do that. There is enough greatness in some men, greatness of mind and heart, that a woman can take a third of him and still have more than most women who marry that rarest of Arctic birds, a monogamist. Cleve was not like that. There was nothing that one could divide by three." With a graceful sweep of the hand she touched lightly first her brow and then her heart. "Nothing here and nothing there. He looked like a young Apollo, and he was only an American college boy. And that, my dear, is a desert."

Barbara did not answer, but lay staring across the room, at an outlandish vase, evidently Russian, and some foreign-looking knick-knacks and picture-frames, bronze inlaid with enamel, a good dress-suitcase full. It struck her as remotely amusing that this lady of the world should find it necessary to carry her stage properties about with her; and yet the stage properties impressed Barbara. They undoubtedly gave personality to the cold elegance of this typical, private sitting-room of a typical hotel. Barbara felt suddenly helpless. If Zinotchka Hallam with all her adroitness and experience could not hold Cleve Winsor, what chance had she, Barbara Collingwood, of holding him, with the experience of twenty-one and only a certain shallow sophistication to achieve where Zinotchka

Hallam's worldly wisdom had failed? She sat up, adjusting as well as she could her touselled hair, and reaching for her hat. Mrs. Hallam helped her to her feet.

"Oh, thank you," murmured Barbara. "I'm all right now. I really feel refreshed. I've — I've had the dickens of a day. It makes my head buzz to think of it. I feel like the heroine of a movie thriller. I've been wrecked in an automobile, I've been arrested, I've fainted away." She laughed shortly. "I think I'll go to bed when I get home." She held out her hand. "Good-by. I'm so sorry I made a spectacle of myself. I'm not the fainting sort as a rule."

For an instant Barbara had an awful fear that Mrs. Hallam might take her in her arms and kiss her; foreigners had a way of taking liberties. But her fear was without foundation. Mrs. Hallam was adequately reserved. Her voice only was unequivocally friendly and intimate. "I hope we shall meet again sometime. Do you think we shall?"

Barbara looked unflinchingly into Mrs. Hallam's dark eyes. "That depends, doesn't it?" she said.

A smile flickered at the corners of Mrs. Hallam's lips. "I understand, my dear," she said softly, deciding that on the whole it would be better not to laugh.

"I wonder if you do?" said Barbara.

"I understand this much, at least, that nobody can know half — no, not a tenth — of what goes on in a woman's heart when she knows she is going to have an offer of marriage in half an hour."

An awful impulse to remark that she had had proposals before this, shot into Barbara's mind, but she checked it in time. Five minutes later she was in her own particular taxicab again, driving northward toward the place she was in the habit of calling home.

XXII

OF course, Barbara had not meant what she said when she had expressed her intention of going to bed when she reached home. Her frantic (and very expensive) taxi drive to Fordham and back had left her no nearer a solution to her problem than it found her. Cleve Winsor was coming at six-thirty. That fact was the same at six-fifteen as it had been at three. Yet somehow she felt easier in her mind. The whole matter did not seem of such enormous consequence as it had. She was physically weary and her brain was slightly benumbed. A hypnotist would have found her an acceptable subject.

Delia was waiting for her with a face full of news when Barbara arrived at the house in West Fifty-seventh Street, and followed Barbara quickly to her bedroom and shut the door with interesting solemnity. Delia's face was red and about her eyes were still traces of the flowing of many tears. Barbara did not want to see Delia at that moment, but the eyes were silent appellants against her impulse to beg Delia to leave her alone and come to-morrow.

"You've got to know something," Delia exclaimed with more than a touch of melodrama.

"Oh, heavens, Dee!" cried Barbara. "You haven't raked up that old story, too, have you? Because if you have, I'm not going to listen."

"What old story?"

"Well, if you don't know, I'm not going to tell you. I've got to dress, Dee. Really. I'm awfully sorry."

"You've got to hear." Delia's voice was actually tremulous.

"You sound awfully queer."

"I've just come from Ruth's. He got engaged to us both, one night, when he didn't know what he was doing. And now he's thrown us both over. Ruth doesn't care. She doesn't love him. But — I — do — and —"

"For heaven's sake, Delia, who was it?"

"Who?" Delia wailed. "Why, Chester, of course!"

"Chester! I didn't know you —"

"Well — I do." Delia was on the verge of tears again.

"Say!" cried Barbara not without admiration. "Isn't he the gay, young sport? He's been rushing *me*, too."

"I know it!" cried Delia sharply. "And that's why I had to tell you. You're the one he's really in love with. But Ruth and I want you to know the deceitful person he is —"

"Ruth? I thought you said she didn't care?"

"Well, she doesn't. She's a doormat anyway. Anybody can brush their feet on Ruth. But no man can brush his feet on me. I tell you that. And Chester Howell is going to find out that he can't play with my affections that way and then expect me to keep quiet while he goes ahead making love to another girl just because she's got social position. It isn't your fault that you've got social position. Nor your father's either. And I don't believe your grandfather was a bit better than my father. He came from a farm in America and my father came from a farm in Germany. I don't see why you should be in the Four Hundred, then, and I —"

"You're talking perfect nonsense, Dee," said Barbara a little coldly. "I've never played up my social position and certainly no one wants to marry me for it. But I've got to dress. Really. You come to-morrow morning and I'll promise to talk all day if you want to."

"No. I want you to know all now," said Delia with solemn determination.

"All right. Go ahead. But I've got to dress."

Delia did go ahead, unfolding the tale of Chester's iniquities minutely and with color. Barbara did not continue dressing after all. She stood motionless at the door of her closet, holding a flimsy bit of silken flame in her left hand, while Delia, with glowing eyes, rehearsed the drama of trusting love betrayed. Delia had no sense of humor. Her story was long, being rich in detail. Before it was half over a curious light began to play in Barbara's eyes and about her lips. Delia, intent on her own tragedy, did not notice that Barbara was having difficulty retaining a respectful gravity. She went on with passionate fervor. But when she told how Chester had come in top hat and cutaway to inform her with fitting ceremony that he considered himself disengaged, Barbara burst into peals of laughter more carefree than any she had uttered for days. Delia flushed darkly, looking gross and savage as she glared with trembling lips at Barbara and her hilarity.

"You may think this is funny," she cried. "You wouldn't think it so funny if it was you that was getting left."

"It *is* funny, Dee!" cried Barbara through the subsiding laughter. "Really. It is. You'll think so yourself in a day or two. But say! Did he go straight to Ruth's from your house?"

"Yes. But Ruth fooled him. *She* didn't care."

Again laughter got the better of sympathy. Delia groped for the door-knob.

"Oh, I hate you," she moaned. "I never thought — I could hate — anybody — the way I hate you."

Barbara stopped laughing. "Don't be silly, Dee. It isn't my fault if Chester goes round making an idiot of himself. Is it?"

"I'm going home," wailed Delia.

"I'm sorry. Honestly, Dee."

"Yes, you are! You're nothing of the sort. You're gloating over me."

"You're perfectly silly."

"I'm going home."

Barbara almost let her go without another word, but at the last moment she threw her arms about her, instead, and drew her down on the edge of the bed. Delia wept fitfully over her shoulder and Barbara pressed her hand affectionately, gazing with some concern at the clock on the mantel. Her hand may have seemed to indicate to Delia that she was moved with pity, but her face, which Delia could not see, was quite undisturbed, except by the tidings of the clock. But the cry did Delia immense good, and Barbara's apparent sympathy restored somewhat the hero-worshiper's shattered faith. As Delia was going, Barbara mentioned casually the name of a youngster not yet out of college whose devotion Delia had spurned only the day before. The effect was what is called electric. When Delia finally departed she had a new glint in her eye.

Barbara with her head curiously filled with Chester Howell and his escapade, dressed with mad haste, but even so, she was still incompletely attired when she heard the ring of the front door-bell and knew that at last the fatal moment was at hand. She had told Cleve Winsor that supper was at six-thirty, and here he was. She heard the soft footsteps of the butler ascending the stairs. What was she going to say to Cleve Winsor? What was her mother going to say to Cleve Winsor? Would she actually refuse him entrance as she had threatened? Evidently not, for here was the butler. There was something strange about this. Her mother was not in the habit of changing her mind. The butler knocked. "Mr. Paraway is calling, Miss Barbara."

She sat down on the edge of the bed immensely relieved, leaning her head against the cold brass ball on the bed post, and smiling beatifically. It was not that she was glad to see Tom, she said to herself, but that she

dreaded anything resembling conflict. It seemed to her that all her qualities as a fighter had been shredded to bits. Tom was a momentary reprieve. For a minute she did not think of the fact that he was also a complication, making any private interview with Cleve Winsor impossible. But even when she did think of this, it did not seem to bother her. Nothing that promised peace even for ten minutes could be anything but a blessing. She told the butler to ask Mr. Paraway to come up to the sitting-room, and hastily put on the finishing touches.

She heard Tom ascend the stairs and greet Mrs. Collingwood. His voice was like salve to chapped lips. There was healing in its quiet, unemotional strength. She felt suddenly elated.

With more care even than usual she examined herself in the mirror before going forth. Her face did not satisfy her. There were certain new lines elongating it, which she did not like; and the pink of her cheeks, generally supposed to be indestructible by fag or illness alike, was contracted to a spot of red, high on each cheek. She amended that situation by the aid of a little jar that restored the customary glow in no more time than it takes to rub each cheek lightly. She regarded her lips critically in the mirror, pursing them up. A little rubbing made them likewise glow with their natural color. She powdered her nose lightly. She had never been so glad before to see Tom Paraway.

If Tom was similarly moved, he disguised his feelings, for he was quite matter of fact as he greeted her. Her first emotion was relief at seeing no bandages; she had had visions of a swathed head. But his appearance was quite normal. There was a bit of a patch on his crown, giving the impression of a bald spot, but beside this there was no evidence of his furious encounter with his whilom guest the night before. Mrs. Collingwood disappeared through one door as Barbara appeared through the other.

Barbara held out her hand, and Tom shook it unconcernedly as he would a man's. "My eye!" he cried, looking her over with an admiration that was slightly ironical. "Preparedness!"

She lifted her chin sharply. "I didn't dress up for you."

"So I suspected," he remarked, rubbing one cheek meditatively.

Barbara understood the significance of the gesture and walked past him to the window without answering. She happened to know that Tom considered paint vulgar. She considered it vulgar herself, using it now and then only because she was convinced that she applied it so expertly that no one would guess that it *was* paint. She glanced through the crack between the window-frame and the shade; then slowly turned again to Tom Paraway. Her resentment evaporated. She was in a mood to be grateful for his friendly criticism, since it implied a kind of protective interest, and at that moment she wanted nothing half so much as to be protected.

They sat down on the broad Davenport. "Did you come because I telephoned?" asked Barbara.

"Yes. I just got your message a half hour ago or I'd have come sooner."

"I didn't leave any message."

"You called three times. I supposed that that meant that you wanted to talk to me."

She laughed softly at that. "What did your mother think of it?"

"My mother was noncommittal. I suspect she has a bad conscience. She always does — when she hurts any one." He spoke the words with some difficulty.

"Tell her from me, will you, Tom, that I didn't mind — very much — and that she needn't feel sorry for my sake? I've done a lot of — nasty things myself off and on, so I don't feel that I have any right — to throw

stones." Her voice was unusually gentle and humble. Tom frowned, puzzled, glancing at her where she sat, bent forward, with her folded hands between her knees.

"I did want like the dickens to talk to you this afternoon, Tom," she went on, with eyes fixed on a bit of shining brass at the other side of the room. "Cleve's father has telegraphed for him, and he has to go back home to-night. He told me at three. I asked him to come to dinner. He ought to be here any minute." Her eyes roved nervously over to the clock on the mantelpiece. It indicated twenty minutes to seven.

Tom rose quickly. "That's a hint, isn't it?"

She clutched his arm. "I didn't mean it for a hint, Tom. I want — to talk to you. That's why I tried to get hold of you this afternoon. It seemed to me I'd go crazy if I didn't get some advice somewhere, and no one could give me any; no one but mother, of course, and mother's advice doesn't count. It's never disinterested."

"What makes you think my advice would be disinterested?"

"I don't know," she said slowly, "except that you're fair, and wouldn't ever take advantage of any one asking your opinion."

"How do you know I wouldn't?" His voice was low and rather serious.

"I just know."

"Well, shoot," said he.

"Cleve's coming for his definite answer to-night," Barbara said abruptly.

Tom rose to his feet and stood beside her, gazing down on the head of shimmering yellow hair. "You don't want *me* to tell you whether you ought to marry him or not, do you?" he asked, with an absurd gesture of helplessness.

"I suppose not," she answered thoughtfully, in a strained voice. "But I'm just weak-minded enough to wish that somebody would. I've thought about it all so

much that I don't seem able to think any more. What's worse, I don't seem to care what I do or what becomes of me. I only feel sure that whatever I do, I'll be sorry for it afterwards. It's ghastly."

"You'd be sorrier if you took any one's advice."

"I suppose so."

"You know, you're not naturally amenable to advice," he said smiling, astride of a cane-bottomed chair before her. "I suspect that if you ever took any you'd never forgive the person that gave it to you."

"That's a polite way of saying I'm pig-headed, I suppose?"

"I don't know. You're independent, mainly. You prefer to learn by experience."

"I don't squeal if things go wrong, anyway."

"I know you don't. I think you're a good deal of a fellow, myself."

She shrugged her shoulders, evidently gratified, yet trying not to look too pleased. "I've really tried to be wise, Tom," she said in a low voice. "I've really gone out of my way to get advice from people who ought to know."

"I wonder," mused Tom, "whether it was advice you wanted or whether you just preferred having some one else do your thinking for you?"

He heard her catch her breath. "I hadn't — thought — of that," she said. "Perhaps it *was* just mental laziness. My head *is* tired. I don't seem to be able to think straight. What do you think of Cleve, Tom?"

He laughed softly, tipping back the chair. "There you go again. You want to go easy, asking one man's opinion of another. Especially when you know that both men have, well, call it a profound regard for you."

There was a moment's pause. "I trust your opinion a lot," said Barbara at last almost plaintively.

"I am grateful for that."

"I think I'd be willing to accept — as gospel — your judgment of a man." She spoke the words slowly and with sincerity.

Tom looked at her and let the forelegs of the chair descend to the floor. "Don't take any man's say-so for gospel, Bee. A man may want to be unprejudiced and think that he is really fair and just, and all the time his feelings may be playing jackrabbits with his vision. That's the devil — the possibility that one may be lying without knowing it."

A wonderful sense of quiet-after-storm came over Barbara as she listened to him. With Tom she always felt a happy absence of strain. The thought suddenly occurred to her that this was the glory of marriage, that a man and a woman should sit together and quietly talk over the tangles of life, warm with love and growing in understanding; calm, yet conscious always of the ecstasy ready to break into wings from any brown, commonplace shell of a word.

For a minute or two they sat in silence, both happier than they had ever been together. "Tom," said Barbara then, in a voice so musical that he scarcely recognized it, "I don't care what you say. Your judgment may be all off, but it's not half as off as mine. I'm going to put the whole matter up to you." She paused, then she went on, pronouncing the words with deliberation, "Shall I tell Cleve Winsor that I won't marry him?"

He looked up sharply, recognizing something beside the desire for advice in her tones. There was a note of alluring coquetry there that sent the blood to his head in a sudden wave, and ran up and down his back as though his back were a harp. He wanted to jump up from his chair and take a walk, but tradition opposed such evidences of emotion; he merely gritted his teeth, and in his attempt to control the boiling springs within, spoke a bit more coolly than he intended.

"Suit yourself," he said. "It's your own funeral."

Barbara had evidently not expected quite so unromantic a reply, for she frowned, and began tapping the floor with one flame-colored slipper. With her eyes on the slipper as it glinted, catching the light, she said softly, "Don't you like me any more?"

He did not answer at once, but gulped and cleared his throat. "Of course I like you."

She nodded dreamily three times. "Well?" she murmured.

"That has nothing to do with the case."

She turned suddenly and looked at him with the tenderest, most trusting glance in the world. It staggered him a little. It was so unexpected. "Aren't you interested any more — in my future?"

"Of course, I'm interested." His voice had a shade of irritation in it. It struck him that he was being most infernally tempted; and he did not enjoy resisting.

"Well?" queried Barbara.

He looked searchingly into the face raised to his. There was a tender appeal in those eyes such as he had not seen there since Barbara had been a little girl. They were beautiful eyes, warmed thus with the glow of tenderness; child-like eyes, deep-seeing, eager, innocent.

"You asked me to marry you two days ago," she said.

"I know I did."

A long silence followed, broken at last by Barbara, speaking softly and with evident difficulty. "What's come over you since then, Tom? You haven't been the same at all. You've been cross and critical and standoffish and —"

He crossed the room suddenly — for him an unusual betrayal of emotion — turning sharply at the end of four strides.

"I *haven't* changed," he cried almost vehemently.

"Well?" murmured Barbara.

He took a quick step nearer; and at that moment the front door bell rang.

Barbara jumped to her feet. "Heavens!" she cried. "It's Cleve."

"He won't eat you."

"Oh, but there'll be a row. Don't you understand? Mother says she's not going to let him in. There'll be a row. And I just can't bear the thought of another row."

"Your nerves are on edge," he said with just that brotherly inflection which she wished at the moment least to hear. "Why don't you shake the lot of us and go to bed? You may do something foolish if you don't get some sleep one of these days."

She sank down on the arm of the couch, without answering. The door-bell rang once more. She straightened up, shuddering. "Why doesn't some one open the door?" she cried nervously.

"Do you want him to come in?"

Barbara raised her handkerchief suddenly to her lips and crossed to the darker part of the room where the bay-window was, sinking down on the window-seat and holding back the shade and staring out into the wet night.

"Hadn't I better be going?" said Tom.

She let the shade fall from her hand, but did not change her posture, now staring at the cedar-green holland. "That depends," she whispered.

"On what?"

"On you."

He found sudden difficulty in articulating. "How?" he asked at last.

She turned a haggard face toward him. "If you don't know — I can't tell you."

He went over to her and reached out both hands. She laid her own in them, looking up at him with large eyes.

"You're a brick," he said. "And I needn't tell you

what other things I think you are. You might get conceited. But I want you to do me a favor."

"Yes?" she said breathlessly.

"I want you to forget your mother and Brother Winsor and all of us, and go to bed, and get some sleep. Then when you've slept for twenty-four hours we'll return to conversation. How about it?"

She drew away her hands and let them hang limply. But she made no attempt to retort. She merely closed her eyes, moaning ever so faintly. For an instant her head nodded to this side and that, as though she had lost the power of balancing it. "I *am* dead tired," she murmured. "I'm tired out with the struggle. I don't want to fight any more. If you really still want me — I'll — give in, Tom. I'll — marry you."

His mouth opened slowly and closed again with a snap. Barbara straightened up on the window-seat. Her face seemed horribly white about the area of rouge.

"I do still want you, Bee," he said at last in low tones, as though he were having difficulty keeping his voice clear. "But I couldn't think of taking you under these conditions. You've been spinning on your ear so, that you don't know whether you're standing on your head or your feet. I don't want you to marry me because you're tired out and because marrying me looks like a simple way of getting the problem settled. You might discover after a week of quiet that you hated me like poison; and that would be too bad. You see, you'd get over your tiredness, and then you'd begin to think of these other fellows again, and perhaps consider that I'd taken advantage of you and feel imprisoned."

"You — do — think I'm weak-minded!" she cried faintly.

"No, I don't!" he answered with emphasis. "And you know it. Your mind's all right when it's working. But it isn't working now. It's lying down. I don't blame

your mind for lying down, Barbara. It needs a rest. But for both our sakes I'm not going to let you throw yourself in my arms just because you're too worn out to do anything else."

She grasped the edges of the window-seat cushion, looking up at him. It seemed to Tom that the air in the room grew suddenly chilly. Her mouth seemed to diminish to a straight, sharp line. "Just as you say," she answered. She rose to her feet. "You know best, of course."

"Don't take it that way, Bee!"

Barbara returned to the Davenport. "I don't know what you mean," she said frigidly, turning. "There's only one way to take it. I tell you that I've decided to accept you, and you answer that you've changed your mind. That's all there is to it. I'm not going to hold you against your will."

"Bee, you're talking through your hat. I haven't changed my mind, and you know it."

"I don't see that there is any use arguing about it, do you?" she remarked with icy courtesy.

"Yes, I do."

"Please don't."

But at that moment a familiar voice became audible below. "Look here, you!" it was shouting. "I've had an invitation to supper in this house to-night, and there aren't enough English butlers in New York City to turn me out. Y'understand?"

Tom gave Barbara a quick glance. She was standing rigid, with flushed face, twisting a push button in its cave in the arm of the Davenport. "Your friend seems to have arrived all right," he remarked with the faintest hint of a smile.

Barbara lifted her head sharply, went to the door and opened it. "Mother!" she called.

Mrs. Collingwood appeared promptly from Barbara's bedroom. "Yes, Barbara?"

"Will you please see that Mr. Winsor is allowed to come in?" said Barbara in an icy whisper.

"Mr. Winsor is not going to have supper here."

"Mr. Winsor *is* going to have supper here."

"I have given in to you very often, Barbara, but I cannot give in to you now. It would be wicked of me to give in to you now."

"Do you want me to make a scene before the butler?"

"You will have to use your own judgment as to that."

This dialogue was carried on in fierce whispers in the corridor. The contestants below seemed to be awaiting its outcome, for they were silent until quiet had again fallen on the upper hall. Then Cleve Winsor's voice again made itself heard. "There's no use your trying to use force, old man. You saw what I did to that fellow last night. Well, I'm still strong."

"Very good, sir," came the voice of the butler, speaking haughtily. "I will call the police."

"Mother!" cried Barbara in a panic. "He isn't going to call the police?"

"I warned you, Barbara, not to invite Mr. Winsor."

"But it's perfectly absurd. You'll have the whole thing in the papers. Everybody'll be talking about us. Do be reasonable for once!"

Mrs. Collingwood did not immediately answer, but Barbara was in no doubt concerning what the answer would be. No Christian ever went to the lions with a more determined expression than the expression on Mrs. Collingwood's face as she said, "The time for compromise is past, Barbara. I do not intend to have that man at my table. I do not intend to connive in any way in his vulgar attempts to make love to you. That may not be reasonable, but it is the only attitude that I can take, to keep my conscience clear."

"Oh, there's that conscience of yours again!" cried Barbara.

"Hadn't you better arbitrate?" suggested Tom Paraway.

"Madam," murmured Rising, the exemplary First Butler, unexpectedly at her elbow, having noiselessly ascended the stairs, "shall I telephone for the police?" His face was solemn, but his voice was comically matter of fact. He might have been saying, "Shall I pass the vegetables again, madam?" "The gentleman has expressed his intention of staying," he added. "In fact, madam, I believe he has entered the drawing-room."

"You may use the instrument in my sitting-room, Rising," said Mrs. Collingwood.

"No!" exclaimed Barbara.

"Madam?"

"If Rising telephones for the police," Barbara cried in low, harsh tones, "I'll — I'll run away — and marry Cleve Winsor. I will. Now take your choice."

"I think, under the circumstances," said the First Butler elegantly, "that I had better relieve you from this dilemma by resigning from your service. Moreover, I am averse to disturbances among gentlefolk."

"Rising, that is perfectly absurd!" cried Mrs. Collingwood. "Don't talk nonsense."

"I am quite resolved, madam."

"Very well," Mrs. Collingwood answered with dignity. "Of course, you will get neither pay nor reference."

The First Butler drew himself up. "As to pay, madam, I was paid on Friday and will be glad to sacrifice two days of honorable service for my freedom. As to a reference, madam, one from a house where such upheavals occur would scarcely be of value to me. I bid you good evening." He bowed formally to Mrs. Collingwood, to Barbara, to Tom; then solemnly ascended the stairs.

Tom chuckled suddenly, and before the indignant First Butler had gained the third floor, was sending a peal of hilarious laughter after him. It occurred to him that

Rising had saved the situation. But a glance at Barbara and Mrs. Collingwood convinced him that neither considered the situation saved in the least. Their expressions were hard and resolved as before. His laughter subsided abruptly. He felt that he ought evidently to be ashamed of himself; but he could not for the life of him regard this conflict in the corridor, one flight up, with complete seriousness. The defection of Rising had injected an ineradicable germ of humor into it.

And the deadlock was broken after all.

"Barbara," said Mrs. Collingwood, "if you will go into that front room and behave yourself, I will go downstairs and talk to Mr. Winsor."

Barbara did not answer; without a word, she turned and re-entered the living-room. Tom followed her. She regarded him coldly.

"You'll find magazines in the bookcase," she said.

"Now, Bee," pleaded Tom, "don't be uppish. You look just like Rising, the butler, when you talk like that."

Again, Barbara did not vouchsafe an answer, but entered her bedroom, humming, and closed the door behind her. She might have flung herself on the bed and gone instantly to sleep, but she did nothing of the sort. She opened the door to the corridor, listening for sounds of conflict from below. None reached her. Thereupon she walked dreamily about the room, still humming, and moved a knick-knack or a picture-frame an inch or two this way or that on the overcrowded mantelpiece. In the drawing-room below momentous issues were being decided, but she did not appear, even to herself, to care much which way the decision fell. Men were a nuisance, some unwearying imp in her mind reiterated like a cricket, and marriage was a nuisance, and life in general was a nuisance, and the only sensible thing Shakespeare or Longfellow or somebody ever said was that our silly life was rounded with a sleep. She dumped the drawer of her dressing-table on the plate-

glass top, and began sorting the thousand things in it, as though her life depended on the effort.

The minutes passed. She heard Rising, the Butler, descend the stairs with the heavy tread of indignation; she heard Radcliffe, the Second Butler, ascend shortly after, and ten minutes later, descend with similar tread. A few minutes after that, she heard the excited gabble of Ali Baba, muttering French to himself. He knocked at her door to inform her that supper had been prepared a half hour or more and that both the butlers had suddenly departed, and what was a self-respecting chef to do with such deserting dogs?

Barbara hadn't the least idea, and told him so.

Ali Baba returned to his cave, still muttering; and Barbara continued to fold up ribbons with care; and Tom Paraway, in the living-room, looked down upon the wet blackness of Fifty-seventh Street, watching a 'bus from Riverside lurch heavily on into the storm.

XXIII

CLEVE WINSOR, still in his overcoat, was slouching in one of Mrs. Collingwood's best upholstered chairs when Barbara's mother entered the drawing-room. In spite of the bigness of the issues about to be decided, she found herself noting that the overcoat was soaking wet. She had never cared two pins about that chair, or any piece of furniture before, but for some reason, the picture of that steaming fur-coat against the delicate pearl-gray satin irritated her beyond endurance.

He rose to his feet slowly. "How do you do?" he remarked, with his arrogant smile. His hands were in his trouser pockets. He was the picture of imperturbable self-assurance.

"If you had the first elements of a gentleman," cried Mrs. Collingwood, "you would keep your wet clothes out of the drawing-room. If you wish me to talk to you, go and leave your coat in the hall."

Young Lochinvar had not expected any attack of that sort. He lifted his eyebrows and gave a whistle, faintly audible, swaying backwards and forwards on his heels. "Oh!" he remarked, staring at Mrs. Collingwood with a cool who-are-you-anyway expression; then turned abruptly and did as he was told.

When he returned, he found Mrs. Collingwood in the identical spot where he had left her. He was about to make some flippant remark, to show how self-possessed he was, when she spoke, indicating the chair he had already ruined. "Sit down," she said.

He sat down, a little angry. Mrs. Collingwood, quite calm now, sank down on a sofa eight or ten feet away.

Neither spoke for half a minute or more — an interminable age it seemed. "Mr. Winsor," began Mrs. Collingwood at last.

Cleve leaped to his feet and began pacing the floor. She waited for him to grow calm again. Suddenly he stood still in front of her and drew a package of cigarettes from his pocket. "May I smoke?"

"No," she answered with quiet firmness.

He stared at her, amazed. Indeed, Mrs. Collingwood was amazed at herself. She had never before refused a similar request. Cleve Winsor was getting on her nerves.

"Oh, all *right!*" he cried, thrusting the cigarettes back in his pocket, and beginning to pace the floor again. He left a path on the carpet, Mrs. Collingwood noticed.

"Please sit down, Mr. Winsor," she said.

He threw back his head, saying to himself that he was damned if he would. "Sit down, Mr. Winsor," she repeated.

He slumped into his chair.

"You cannot see Barbara, Mr. Winsor."

He straightened up promptly, recovering his control somewhat, now that the battle was finally on. "I intend to see Barbara, Mrs. Collingwood."

Barbara's mother did not enjoy fighting, and her face revealed her distaste for it. There was no suggestion of the exultation in the mere act of struggling that spirits far less indomitable than hers experience. There was no gleam in her eyes. Her skin was almost unbelievably gray. She looked sixty-five. The lines of her face seemed cast-iron.

"You shall not see Barbara under any circumstances," said Mrs. Collingwood.

"That's where you're mistaken, Mrs. Collingwood." His voice was sharp. "Barbara and I are engaged. I have a right to see her."

"I don't believe you are engaged."

"Well, we're as good as engaged."

"It would not make any difference to me if you were engaged."

"I thought you didn't believe in coercion," drawled Cleve Winsor.

"What I believe in or do not believe in, Mr. Winsor, is not the important point at the moment. I know that if Barbara married you she would be miserably unhappy, and I have made up my mind that she is not going to marry you."

He did not answer at once. His self-assurance wavered before her sincerity, wavered and gave way. He suddenly found himself respecting Mrs. Collingwood very much.

"Why do you say that?" he asked, in an altered voice.

Mrs. Collingwood noted the change in his manner, and her heart was softened. She was very fond of boys and very sorry for them. She understood their difficulties; viewing them more clearly, in fact, than she viewed Barbara's — possibly because she was in no wise responsible for their solution. She had steered many an excellent but bewildered youth out of the rapids into smooth waters, generally matrimonial; and in her eagerness to help almost forgot that she had come downstairs to show Cleve Winsor the door. The muddy track across her drawing-room carpet hardened her once more, for its own sake and for what it symbolized.

"You know very well what you are," she said coldly. "Do you think that any mother in her senses would be willing to have you marry her daughter except over her dead body?"

"Oh, see here!" he protested. "You're laying it on altogether too thick."

"You see, Mr. Winsor, I know all about you."

He jumped to his feet. "Who's been telling lies now?" he cried. "If any blackguard has been gossiping to you, Mrs. Collingwood, I'll shoot him. Do you hear? Or

horsewhip him. I won't be slandered. Perhaps, a man can safely slander another man in the East, but he can't do it where I come from, Mrs. Collingwood. We've got red blood in our veins, where I come from!"

Mrs. Collingwood listened to him, regarding him with a stony, expressionless face. His eloquence petered out before it.

"I saw Mrs. Hallam this morning," said Mrs. Collingwood quietly.

He threw up his hands and sank into his chair.

"Now do you understand," she went on, "why I am not going to let you see Barbara again?"

He jumped to his feet, strode to the window and back, and dropped again into the chair, now holding his head in his hands, staring at the floor. "I suppose so," he muttered. "I don't suppose I ever could make you understand that what I may have done when I was eighteen or nineteen or twenty hasn't anything to do with my making Barbara happy. I suppose, in your eyes, I sinned, and I'm everlastingly damned through life and eternity. I tell you, Mrs. Collingwood, that the man who gets his wild oats sowed early makes a better husband than your goody-goody kind who doesn't discover the other sort of woman till he's forty. You can take that from me!"

"I've heard all that a great many times before, Mr. Winsor. And it's one of the silliest excuses that man ever invented to cover his evil conscience."

"You're talking pretty straight, aren't you?"

"If you're a man you won't want me to talk any way — but straight."

He looked up and gradually pulled himself together until he was no longer slouching. "I *am* a man, Mrs. Collingwood." He shrugged his shoulders. "At least, I want to be. I — I haven't been talked to — straight, like that, much. I've got the sweetest mother you ever saw, but I've rather bossed her, I guess, ever since I was small.

And my father — he's been too busy to do more than curse me out at intervals, when I got fired from boarding-school and dropped from Yale, and overdrew my allowance and that sort of thing. I'm sorry if I was rude. I've sort of got into a habit of having my own way and walking over people. I guess I deserve to get it hot."

His voice was low and penitent. There was no question of his sincerity. In Mrs. Collingwood's face the hard lines softened, for she loved boys, and the confidences she had received in the course of a quarter century had given her a deep understanding of their difficulties and their struggles. When she spoke, her voice was no less firm than before, but gentler.

"You have behaved very badly."

"I — I guess you're right." He paused; then he added quite humbly, "I apologize, Mrs. Collingwood."

"Heaven!" she cried. "It isn't apologies I want."

He leaned forward eagerly. "What is it you want? Won't you tell me what it is?"

Mrs. Collingwood looked into his eyes. "Mr. Winsor, I want you to go away."

"I *am* going. But I've got to have Barbara's answer first."

"I am not going to let you see her."

"I've got to see her, Mrs. Collingwood."

"You are not going to see Barbara."

He rose, not impetuously this time, but slowly and not without dignity. "You've been nicer to me, I guess, than I deserve. I don't want to make another scene. But heaven and hell are not going to keep me from seeing Barbara. I'm sorry, Mrs. Collingwood —"

"Cleve, sit down!"

She had never called him by his first name before, and she scarcely knew what possessed her to do it now. He was startled, puzzled; he was more than a little afraid of her. He sat down.

"Cleve, do you love Barbara?"

He stared at her. "Yes, Mrs. Collingwood," he said in a voice unexpectedly boyish in its curious, shy sincerity.

"Are you sure?"

"Ever since I met her, I haven't thought of another thing but her. Morning, noon and night. Why, when a letter came from her —"

"I think you're just infatuated."

"Oh, I don't know what it is!" he burst out vehemently. "I only know I can't be without her. I've got to have her! I want her and I've got to have her!"

Mrs. Collingwood felt a shudder go through her, and drew a deep breath that hurt her about the region of the heart.

"Mr. Winsor," she said at last, very softly, "I try not to be hard, not to be puritanical in my judgments. I try to forgive, because I know how much there is in me which I want others to forgive. You say you love Barbara. You think you can't live without her. I pity you from the bottom of my heart, but don't you realize that you lost your right ever to claim Barbara, or any girl like Barbara, pure and clean; don't you realize that you lost your right ever to claim her, years ago, when you chose for your indulgence to claim that other kind of girl? I don't want to seem hard. But Cleve, to me you are like a leper. I would as soon have Barbara marry a leper as marry you."

There was unmistakable conviction and intensity, though subdued, in her voice, which left him no reason to doubt that she meant exactly what she said.

He gasped and actually seemed to grow a shade paler. Then the blood rose to his cheeks and his hair and to the very tips of his ears. He compressed his lips and folded his arms with an appearance of leisureliness, keeping his eyes fixed on hers, trying to brazen it out. But he failed,

after a minute he failed miserably. His eyes faltered, his arms dropped so that they hung down straight at his sides. Then suddenly he drew himself, with evident difficulty, to his feet and started to walk up and down.

He stopped and pulled his cigarette case from his pocket. "I'm going to smoke," he said defiantly.

"Certainly, if you wish," said Mrs. Collingwood gently.

He lit his cigarette and blew out a long exhausting puff that seemed to draw the last bit of breath from his body. He gave an exclamation of distaste and flung the cigarette half way across the room, so that it dropped on the white marble hearth, where it continued for some time to send up a thin, undulating wisp. Nervously, he lighted another, and after a puff sent it flying after the first; then another. The hearth began to look like a miniature Indian encampment with the smoke rising through the tepee-tops. Mrs. Collingwood, sitting motionless, said to herself that it made the place look like a barroom. Perhaps the same thought occurred to Cleve Winsor, for he strode dreamily to the hearth and stepped on the three smoldering stumps.

Cleve's foot remained on the last of the three a long while, for he seemed to have forgotten time. He was staring at the cold, empty grate. When he turned, Mrs. Collingwood, looking up at him, saw with amazement that his lips were trembling and that there were tears in his eyes.

He flung back his head and bit his lips to control them. But he did not succeed very well. A tear rolled down each cheek. He brushed them away. But behind them were too many to brush away. He leaned against the mantel, with shaking shoulders, weeping against his arm.

"O Cleve!"

Mrs. Collingwood was at his side with her hand on his hand on the mantel-top. "Poor boy, I wish I could help you."

He controlled the tears with a sudden effort and turned to her. His face was like a scarred No-man's-land, wasted and hopeless. "I never knew what love was," he said in low, uncertain tones. "I thought that other thing was love. Nobody ever told me it wasn't. And the straight girls never acted so awfully different from the ones who weren't straight, so that any one would think that hitching up with one crowd made him — a leper to the other. Oh, I can see it now. I feel different toward Barbara than I ever felt toward any other girl, different than I felt even toward her, yesterday. She's so quick and nervy and brave. I admire her just as much as I love her. And — I'm afraid of her, too. I've never been afraid of a girl before."

He said it all with a boyish directness that was very appealing. Mrs. Collingwood knew that she had never been so sorry for any one in her life.

"Do you think I am hard, Cleve? Do you think I am unjust?"

He looked away. "No," he said very slowly. "I guess you know what you're doing. I've been wild all right, though I haven't been any wilder than a lot of men I know that mothers haven't objected to. Not objected so you'd notice it. I guess I thought it was just the natural thing to be — speedy — for a while. I made up my mind I'd settle down when I'd had my fling, just as Dad did." He turned abruptly. "I'll settle down now. I'll buckle down to business. I'll be — I'll be good in every way. I'll go on the water-wagon. I'll never look at another — you know what I mean. Give me a chance, Mrs. Collingwood."

Her hand, which had lain on his, fell to her side and the lines of her face grew a shade sterner. "It's a terrible thing to say for any one who wants grace and mercy for herself," she answered. "But, Cleve, it's too late." She spoke the words reluctantly and painfully.

"No, it isn't!" he cried. "Men have reformed before. Men are reforming every day. You haven't a right to say it's too late. You're a good woman, but you're not Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ never said it was too late."

"No. You *can* reform, and I'll help you in every way in the world to go straight, Cleve, every way but one. You can be good and you can be happy if you make the effort, but you can't be happy exactly in this one way in which you want to be happy. You've thrown away your chance of that. You know, you can't eat your pie and have it, too. You can't go crooked and expect the clean, sweet happiness that comes only to those who go straight. Can you?"

He gulped hard, staring again at the empty grate. "I suppose not." He was silent a long time; then he cried out in a low, husky voice, "Why didn't somebody tell me not to be a damned fool?"

Mrs. Collingwood had no answer for that.

He pulled himself together. "I suppose Barbara told you. I've got to go at eight. Can I see Barbara before I go?"

She looked into his eyes, and in her own was much deep pity, but no wavering at all. "No, Cleve," she said.

"You can stay in the room. It's just — to see her — just once more —"

"No."

"I'm doing as you say," he pleaded. "I'm going — for good. Won't you —"

She shook her head.

He was impelled to be brutal, but the look of spiritual mastery on her face checked him. He straightened up. He found he had an enormous respect for Mrs. Collingwood. He reached out his hand to her. She took it and held it. Her eyes were brimming.

"I am very grateful to you, Cleve, for understanding.

I think you are going to make a man of yourself. If I can help you, write me."

Impulsively, he bent down and kissed her. She took him in her arms and her tears fell on his hair. "God be with you, Cleve," she whispered.

"I'm always going to think of you as a sort of wonderful extra mother," he said.

He went, closing the front door quietly behind him.

XXIV

BARBARA, vaguely and absent-mindedly sorting innumerable odds and ends from the dumped drawer on her bureau-top, heard as in a dream her mother come up the stairs, knock at her door, enter and tell her that Cleve Winsor had gone, and gone for always. The information made no impression on her. To her feverish eyes her mother seemed, not only in sympathy but in body, an immeasurable distance away, a funny animated doll, looking very serious and weepy away off across a room that was fifteen feet wide and three hundred thousand feet long.

She told her mother quite calmly that Cleve Winsor might go or stay like the wind where he listed, it made no difference to her.

In a dream, she heard her mother, now suddenly seeming terribly close by, shout in her ear that Tom Paraway was still in the living-room. Mrs. Collingwood did not really shout. She spoke the words in the same quiet voice with which she had conveyed the previous information. But in Barbara's head was Revolution and the relations between her senses and her brain were strained.

"It's after dark," she remarked calmly. "He'd better go home before his mother begins to worry."

Mrs. Collingwood began to hum softly. Barbara shuddered as though a steam calliope had unexpectedly burst into music behind her dressing-table mirror. Vaguely she realized, a moment later, that her mother had left the room; but she continued as before, sorting out ribbons and things, finding a faint and faraway interest in the fact that they were all an inch thick, which seemed unusual, for ribbons.

In a dream, she heard her mother return and whisper from somewhere a mile away that Tom Paraway had gone.

And then, for some reason or other, she burst into hysterical weeping.

Mrs. Collingwood knelt down beside her with impetuous exclamations of affection. It seemed to Barbara that her mother's arms were enormous, like the arms of a derrick, and she cowered and shrank.

"Go to bed, dear," said Mrs. Collingwood tenderly. "I'll get you a cup of tea and a hot water-bag. You're tired. You've been trying to do too much."

Something whispered to Barbara's subconscious being somewhere that this suggestion was in the nature of a reproach. She stopped weeping as abruptly as she had begun, flung back her head, daubed her eyes with a lace collar which at the great distance from which she seemed to be viewing it looked like a handkerchief, and deliberately continued to sort out and fold ribbons, and ribbons, and ribbons.

"I'm perfectly all right," she said to her mother suddenly, after a five minutes' silence. "I wish you wouldn't bother about me."

In a dream, Barbara heard her mother say something about supper, and disappear; in a dream she saw her as magically reappear with a tray, apparently jumping out of the wall. She heard her say something about eating, and in a second it seemed to her that she was being wafted to sleep by intoxicating fumes of buttered toast.

"Thanks, Mother," she said politely, ate the toast, drank the tea that came with it and quietly resumed her folding of ribbons.

Her mother disappeared, appeared again and disappeared with the inconsequential abruptness, it seemed to Barbara, of a jack-in-the-box. From afar off across space she heard something about church and about being

back at nine, and something else about Matilda, the upstairs-girl, who would answer if she rang.

"Answer what?" asked Barbara.

In a dream, she heard the front door shut and knew that her mother had flown off for an hour of spiritual recuperation.

Barbara continued to fold ribbons; she continued to fold them even after the stock in her drawer had all been folded once, carefully laying to one side all those she had worn on occasions when Tom Paraway had expressed admiration of her general appearance. She was dimly undecided whether to burn them or to ask her mother to put them in her safe deposit box.

In a dream, she heard the front door-bell ring and after a long time she saw the hatchet-face of Matilda, the Swede, approaching from the vast distance of her bedroom door.

In a dream, she heard a name and felt her own hands, like enormous paws, rummaging about her hair, to straighten it out. In a dream, she walked downstairs and cheerfully greeted Chester Howell.

She sank into the most comfortable chair in the drawing-room, wondering vaguely why there was an odor of cigarettes and steaming fur in the air. From afar off she saw Chester's pleasant face and heard his pleasant gabble, aware that she was enjoying Chester as she had never enjoyed him before. He was such a dear boy, and he had such a wonderful mother and love was the greatest thing in the world after all, and she wanted a mother as well as a lover and oh, the peace, peace, peace of the dimlit room and Chester's jolly talkativeness. She was on a ship at sea, rocking, rocking and drawing closer and closer to a wide open harbor of green shores —

She began to talk herself. Chester said something about a partnership and with a feeling that she was walk-

ing along golden clouds to the golden gate of Paradise, she listened and answered. She felt herself laughing, and thought how wonderful that she was so happy. She was now doing all the talking, aware that she had never been so brilliant and profound before.

Chester listened, thrilled at first by her evident willingness to take his love-making seriously, after so long a period of scoffing. It was all too wonderful to be true. "Now," he said to himself, "now Mother'll have to have respect for me." But suddenly, it seemed to him, a chill struck his ardor dead. He sat back, silent, as minute by minute Disillusionment like a great gray cloud closed in on him from all about and snuffed out a romance.

How could he ever have thought he loved this girl who sat opposite him in the shadow, chattering such unutterable tommyrot? He liked nonsense himself, but Barbara was talking drivel. Such platitudes, such cheap stuff, such soul-sickening puns! And she evidently thought she was being funny. He clenched his fingers and grew cold and hot and cold again as Barbara began to tell jokes that were slightly *risqué*.

Chester thought of Ruth Torrey, that sweet and exquisite flower, and Barbara that moment seemed like an empty-headed chorus-girl beside her.

Barbara gabbled on, in a delirious dream. At last, Chester, looking miserable and five years older, offered a poor excuse and went. Barbara watched him go, for what seemed hours, down the enormous stretch of space between the chair where she sat and the wide door that led to the hall. The harbor of the green shores vanished. She was afloat alone on a dismal, infinite ocean.

She felt the ocean spinning round, but with a sudden effort she seemed to drag herself out of it and set her foot on solid earth. She felt as though some one had dashed cold water in her face, shivered, and slowly returned to full consciousness.

She wondered for a minute why she was where she was. She thought she had been up in her room. Then she began to remember. Her mother had gone to church, Chester had come to call. He had acted the way he always acted before he proposed to her. She had made up her mind to take him. She had really felt that she could be happy with him. Anyway, she would have a little peace. Then he had suddenly stood up and said good-by. It was very strange, for she had been unusually entertaining —

She felt forsaken. She wanted to cry, and somehow couldn't. She dropped back in the arm-chair, her bosom sunk, her head falling limply forward. The flush of fever had left her cheeks and once more the spots of rouge gleamed wickedly like drops of fresh blood on parchment.

One, two, three.

A little while ago she had had three lovers. The first had rejected her; the second had allowed himself to be driven away by her mother; the third had — had — had merely decided that he didn't want her after all.

For a long, slow hour, alone in the imposing drawing-room, with the faint odor of cold cigarette smoke, Barbara Collingwood, the spoiled little lady of orchids and roses and suitors without number, drank the cup of bitterness.

Mrs. Collingwood did not return until ten o'clock, for numberless friends, after the service, wanted to know all about Barbara's reported engagement to "some interesting young man" from the West. She denied the rumors so emphatically that some of her interrogators began to argue with her. All this consumed time.

This was unfortunate, for Cleve Winsor, having missed his train and taken a drink or two to soothe his lacerated emotions, had been suddenly seized with the comforting conviction that he, a red-blooded young man, had been outrageously imposed upon by a "mushy old woman."

He began to be very sorry for himself. He told himself that he was not half so bad as some men he knew who had been run after and snatched by mothers of girls exactly as nice as Barbara. It seemed to him that he was being unjustly discriminated against. How did Mrs. Collingwood know that he might not make Barbara happy? With a good wife to help him, he might become a very noble sort of person. Some of the saintliest saints had been much worse in their youth than he. One of them in particular.

He ran over in his mind all the saints he had ever heard of — St. Paul, St. Louis, St. Jo, St. Augustine, St. Julien, St. Nicholas, St. Patrick, San Francisco —

St. Francis! That was the fellow. St. Francis of Assisi. He had been a "hell-dinger" for fair, and now look what people thought of him!

He mentally kicked himself for not thinking of St. Francis while he was arguing with Mrs. Collingwood.

He thought that if he could have just ten minutes with Barbara's mother, he might be able to win her over. A religious woman like Mrs. Collingwood, he mused, would be impressed by the mention of St. Francis.

There was no harm in another interview anyway. And there was just a chance that he might see Barbara. He determined that it would be weak and unmanly of him not to make one more attempt.

XXV

MATILDA showed him directly into the drawing-room and before Barbara had recovered from the shock of suddenly seeing him standing, erect and impressive, in the doorway, she was in his arms.

From the depths of misery to the very pinnacles of bliss — all in less than sixty seconds! Surrender! Surrender! Every drop of blood in her veins seemed to be singing songs of jubilant surrender. The fight was done, there was to be no more struggling against the hordes of doubt and distrust and fear. A Knight in Armor had come and put them to flight for her, and she was his in glorious surrender. She felt his arms firm about her, and relaxed more deeply into them for the sheer luxury of feeling his strength upholding her weakness. He kissed her until her face burned, but she surrendered her face to him as she would a flower.

"You're going with me," he whispered in her ear. "You're going with me."

"I don't care," she murmured. "I don't care. Anything. Anything."

"Is your mother upstairs?" His voice was a little hoarse.

"No," she gasped. "At church. Back — any minute."

"Go upstairs. Get traveling clothes on."

"Oh, no, Cleve, I can't. Not this way. I can't." She choked.

"Don't argue now. You're going."

She threw her arms about his neck, gasping and panting. "I can't. I mustn't. To-morrow. Anywhere to-

morrow. Really I will. Cross my heart. But not to-night. I'll go to the end of the world to-morrow."

"You're going now."

"Oh, Cleve, please."

"You'll do as I tell you."

"But suppose Mother comes?"

"I'll tie her hand and foot if necessary."

"Oh, Cleve, you're crazy. You don't know what you're saying. You eyes are perfectly wild."

He clutched her wrists. "You've fooled with me long enough. You've played puppydog with me long enough. Now I'm boss." He kissed her with sudden real tenderness, lightly on each eye. "I won't be a hard boss," he whispered pleadingly. "Not half so hard as I sound."

"Oh, Cleve, Cleve!"

"Go up and change your clothes."

She cast a frightened look at him.

"Quick!" he commanded.

She freed herself, her old, independent individuality, which was not accustomed to taking orders from any one, reasserting itself. "You can't talk to me like that, Cleve," she said in a low voice, breathing heavily.

But the bully was uppermost in him at that moment. He clutched her in his arms, crying in her ears, "I'll talk to you as I please and you'll do as I please. And you know it."

He was quite right. The moment's rebellion gave way before a new, overwhelming impulse of surrender.

"The train leaves Jersey City at one-thirty. We'll get married on the way."

"But, Cleve,— the license."

"I've got it."

"Cleve! How could you know —?"

"Never mind how I knew. I knew."

"Oh, Cleve, are you sure — are you sure you've got it?"

"I told you, didn't I?"

"Yes — but —"

"Go upstairs and get ready."

She gave a frightened gasp.

He took out his watch. "I'll give you just five minutes. Beat it."

She obeyed.

Matilda, three flights up, was taking her pen in hand to indite an affectionate epistle to a Swedish lover, so she did not hear the front door close behind Miss Barbara and the Handsome Gentleman with the Loud Voice.

The taxi shot east to Fifth Avenue, south to Forty-second Street and west to the Weehawken ferry. The streets were wet and shiny and vastly more beautiful than dry and sunlit streets ever are; but there were few folks abroad, either on foot or in motors, to enjoy the soft mauve-and-white magic of it. For it was Sunday night, and a wet and chilly night at that.

Barbara shivered and Cleve impulsively pulled off his coat and threw it about her shoulders and drew her close to him to keep her warm.

"Oh, thanks!" she murmured. "But won't you catch cold?"

"Don't you worry about me," he answered cheerfully. "I'll keep warm just looking at you."

She struggled a little. "I'd rather not have it, really."

"You've got to have it."

She succumbed gratefully. They were both silent while the taxi dashed on, a half dozen blocks.

Barbara leaned forward and a street light for an instant lit up her face.

"What's the matter, Barbara?" he cried. "You look — queer."

He heard her draw in her breath sharply and hold it. "I wonder if I'm crazy — to do this?"

He drew her impetuously to him. "You're in love. That's all, kiddo. You're in love. If it's crazy to be in

love, then we're both crazy. And I'm crazier than you."

"Oh, Cleve! I hope you do love me."

"I do, I do, I do! I really do!"

She was silent a moment. "I'm getting cold feet," she whispered.

He allayed her fears and comforted her with low words and pressure of arms. He knew the arts of persuasion and subtle excitement, and he practiced them all until she lay against his shoulder limp and exhausted. She felt her cheeks burn with a return of the fever, and for a minute he was frightened, for she became a little delirious, calling petulantly for her mother. The delirium passed and, somewhat chastened, he tried to crack a joke or two to quiet the emotions he had been harrowing.

They crossed the ferry, and the sharp, salt air restored Barbara's courage. There was now no turning back. She had left her home at ten o'clock at night to elope with Cleve Winsor, and she would carry the thing through. She told herself that she loved him, that she wanted to marry him; but even if she hadn't loved him, even if she hadn't wanted to marry him, now that she had made her decision there would be no turning back. She told herself that over and over again, as though she wanted to hypnotize herself.

She crouched in a corner of the car, while the ferryboat crawled across the foggy river. Mysterious horns sounded near and far. She glanced out of the window apprehensively and was startled as the fog ahead broke for an instant and revealed a black wall, looming horribly huge ahead. Lights twinkled coldly on its top, remote as stars; then the fog covered the black enormity again and the fog-horn tooted and the boat crawled on.

The taxi leaped over the rattling gang-plank to the pier, out of the dingy ferry-house, into a misty, terrifying world. Vaguely before them rose the gray Palisades. The taxi shot to the left, to the right, and then began

slowly to climb the winding street to the town whose lights gleamed vaguely far above them.

Cleve opened the door and called to the chauffeur: "Stop at the first church you see!"

Barbara drew in her breath sharply and held it. What a ghastly way of getting married. "Stop at the first church you see!" The wedding she had planned for herself to the last detail was to have been different. There was to have been a church in it, but the church was to have been full of people, and there were to have been bridesmaids and ushers and a maid of honor and flowers and ribbons and —

The car climbed up and up, reached the summit at last and stopped. The chauffeur was asking the way to the nearest church. The man he had accosted seemed doubtful, but he thought there was a church or two on Park Avenue. The clutch slid raspingly into the gears and the car moved on, slowed down, seemed to hesitate and swung to the left.

Again the car stopped. A light shone on a yellow brick church on the east side of the street. From her place in the car Barbara read the gilt lettering on the shield beside the portal: "German Evangelical Lutheran Church."

"I'm not Lutheran," she cried, and there seemed a note of relief in her voice. "I'm Episcopalian. Try to find an Episcopalian church. Please, Cleve."

Cleve gave the directions and once more the car dashed off into the night. A few blocks south it drew up abruptly at the right hand curb. The chauffeur leaned out and opened the door. "I guess this fits the requirements," he remarked cheerfully.

There was a signboard near the street, revealing to passersby the interesting information that the little brown church with the attractive gable roof, half hidden behind a grove of youngish trees, offered an opportunity to worship God in the manner approved by Barbara Col-

lingwood's hitherto not oversensitive religious instincts.

Cleve Winsor bounded out of the car and disappeared in what appeared to be the parsonage. Barbara felt her heart pounding.

Cleve Winsor was admitted to the parsonage, and remained, it seemed to Barbara, sitting apprehensively on the edge of the seat, for hours. When the door opened again, she heard Cleve speak a short "Good night" that made her sink back in unutterable relief. Cleve was cursing under his breath when he reached the taxi.

"The damn prig, the damn, low-minded hypocrite! If he hadn't been so damn small I'd have hit him, the —"

"Cleve, please!"

"Oh, I know, I know!" he cried impatiently. Then he turned to the chauffeur. "Go on, damn it, and find a *man*, you hear? Not a whimpering prig, but a man!"

Barbara's eyes grew large. The car dashed south again. "The fool had moral objections to marrying people in a hurry," Cleve explained.

"Are you sure the license was all right?" Barbara inquired timidly.

"Of course it was all right. I told you it was all right."

A cold chill seemed to run through her. She shuddered and shrank back into her corner of the cab, wanting nothing so much as to curl up and die. Her ability to strike back was gone. She felt utterly helpless.

"I'm sorry I lost my temper," said Cleve.

"I'm tired, I'm so tired," she whispered. "I wish you'd take me home."

He seized her hand and squeezed it. She felt suddenly like a prisoner.

The car had swung to the left and was running down grade through a park, with the Palisades towering on one side, and on the other, far below, sheds and railroad yards, the misty river, and beyond, the vague luminous shape of

the great city. They coasted down a long grade, turned to the left and then to the right, again to the left, once more to the right, and bumped into a park. The car stopped.

Cleve opened the door. "Do you know what you're trying to do?" he inquired irritably.

"How do you expect me to know where to find exactly the kind of a parson you and your girl want?" the driver retorted. The trip was beginning to get on everybody's nerves.

"Where are we?"

"Hoboken."

"Heavens!" cried Barbara. That name seemed to take the last flicker of glamor from her elopement.

"Stop at a telephone," Cleve ordered.

The driver backed and turned. In a minute their nostrils caught once more the salt smell of the sea. They were on the waterfront. The car stopped at a dingy drug-store, flanked by saloons. Opposite was a high open fence and beyond, dimly lighted, an endless line of warehouses and covered piers. They heard boat whistles in the distance, as from another world.

Cleve dashed for the door of the apothecary's shop. It was locked. He rattled it. No answer. He rattled it again, louder, and at last a portly figure in a mottled dressing-gown appeared out of the dim rear and turned the key.

"I want to telephone," said Cleve sharply.

"Vat you say!" cried in wrath the portly person, evidently German. "You shake my door so, you wake me out of my good sleep so I almost t'ink somebody pretty near lie in dying shure, chust to use my telephone. You go to de devil!"

He tried to slam the door, but Cleve's foot was in the way. "I'll buy your whole damn shop," cried Young Lochinvar. "But I've got to telephone." He thrust a

bill into the man's hands and darted for the telephone-booth. "Turn up your lights! I can't see this fine print in the dark."

The bewildered apothecary indignantly gave him back his bill, and, to Cleve's own amazement, promptly proceeded to obey orders. No question, Cleve Winsor had a way with him, a persuasive way; in his brutal fashion he charmed even while he bullied.

He remained in the telephone booth for twenty minutes, and for twenty minutes Barbara waited, shivering, but beyond the point of resistance or even protest. She was going "to carry this thing through." There seemed to her, indeed, no alternative. She was even now hopelessly compromised. Even if an alternative had appeared to her, she would scarcely at that moment have had the energy to take it. There was no more fight in her. After all, she said to herself, it was good to have peace, even though it were the peace of abject surrender.

But she did not say that to herself more than once, for it brought a sudden memory of the little old lady of Merlin Road, saying "Never surrender! You will never in the world find happiness by surrender. Fight, fight and then fight! Head high, and never surrender!"

She tried to put the thought of her grandmother away from her. This was no time to be thinking of grandmothers. But the old lady's voice rang in her ears and sent a spark along her sluggish blood.

Cleve returned to her at last. "The parsons in this town are all crazy," he muttered, standing by the taxi-door. "But I've got the address of a Magistrate." He gave it to the driver and jumped into the car again. The driver called for directions to the German apothecary, who was standing in silent perplexity and disapproval in the doorway, received them and was off again, along the riverfront a block, then to the right and into the heart of the town.

The house of the Magistrate was a good mile west, and when they reached it, they found that the Magistrate was not at home. He might be found at the Café Barbarossa, the shrill voice that answered their inquiries from an upper window suggested. "And if ye send him home, ye'll be doin' him a good service an' me, too."

The Café Barbarossa, they found, was on the waterfront, so back to the waterfront they returned. The air was damp and chilled Barbara to the marrow. She felt as though she were slowly coagulating. Her feelings, it seemed to her had been frozen stiff long ago.

They found the Magistrate at last. In a room, thick with tobacco smoke, behind the bar-room, Cleve found him playing poker with a stout, red-faced Irish police captain and an officer of one of the blockaded German liners. The Magistrate himself was stout and Irish, and he was slightly drunk.

Cleve took him aside, pressed a roll of bills into his hand and told him what he wanted. The man winked. He had large round eyes and lids that met in the middle like an owl's.

"Shure, come on," he shouted. "Bring in the lady. Family entrance on the right."

Cleve returned to the taxi. "It's all right. Come on in."

Barbara half rose and fell back in her seat. "Cleve," she cried in low, breathless, uncertain tones, "I — I — I can't do it, Cleve. I can't. Take me home, Cleve."

He did not bully her this time. "Yes, you can do it, Barbara," he whispered. "I know it's hard, but I love you and you love me —"

"I — want — to — go — home."

"No!" he cried softly but with an intensity that suddenly set her teeth chattering. "You're mine! And I'm not going to let you get away from me. Not now and never!"

She began to cry. He took her in his arms and once more the flame seemed to flare up in her, and she let him lead her by the hand through a black door, up a dingy flight of stairs lit by a smoky lamp into a dingy room. The Magistrate was waiting, with the police captain and the ship's officer as witnesses. There was a smell of stale beer and cheap tobacco in the air.

And there, without more ado, Cleve Winsor and Barbara Collingwood were married.

XXVI

CLEVE bent over to kiss her. But she could not bear a kiss from him at that moment, and she flung back her head, so that her eyes fell unexpectedly on the Magistrate.

He was at that moment giving a slow, expressive, leering wink.

For an instant she felt as though she would burn up for shame and loathing; then, still flushing, she allowed Cleve to kiss her after all. Her voice when she spoke was gayer than it had been for hours. "Say, Cleve! I'm crazy to tell everybody about it. I never knew anything so wildly romantic, did you?"

He laughed happily, and they descended the stairs, hand in hand. She was thinking, "When he's buying the tickets for the train and his back is turned —"

At the foot of the stairs the Magistrate's voice halted them. "Say, you! One minute!" he called.

He descended heavily and they waited. He drew Cleve aside. Barbara heard angry whispers and she raised her head quickly, alert as a doe. "I paid you fifty dollars!" she heard Cleve say.

"Well, if you know what's good for you, you'll come across with fifty more!"

Cleve answered hotly. She watched him with straining eyes. His attention was on the Magistrate. She took a sudden breath and, silent as a cat, slipped out of the door, dashed across the sidewalk and into the taxi.

"Take me home, take me home!" she cried.

"Jesus Christ!" muttered the driver and was off like mad toward the Hoboken ferry.

Barbara knelt on the seat and peered out through the little rear window of the cab. She saw Cleve running out of the house. She heard him shout.

There was no boat in the slip. There would be no boat for half an hour. Barbara's teeth were chattering. "God, God, dear God, help me!" she muttered.

"Say!" cried the driver, peering in at her. "What's he tryin' to put over — a kidnapping game?"

"No — yes — I don't know — I only want to get home."

He backed the car, turned sharply and shot up a dark street under the elevated. Six or eight blocks west, he turned again, speeding north. On the long up-grade they had coasted down an hour before, his engine stopped dead.

He did not have to investigate long. "What do you know?" he said with unmistakable regret, opening the taxi door, "no more gas."

Barbara leaped out. "I'll take a trolley."

"That's all right, but who's goin' to pay me?" he inquired with almost pathetic helplessness. "The meter says thirty-eight dollars. See for yourself. I want you to get away but —"

Barbara gave him her name and address. The driver was rueful but resigned. From the distance, to the south, a trolley came clanging. Barbara clambered aboard the empty trolley car, discovered that she did not have a cent of money with her, and, after an argument, sold the conductor a pearl brooch for a dollar.

And even then, she had to pull the bell-cord suddenly and leap from the car a mile or so from the Weehawken ferry, since the conductor insisted on taking seriously the daubs of rouge on her lips and cheeks.

It was one o'clock when she reached the ferry-house, footsore and weary beyond words. Fortune was kind

here, for there was a boat in the slip, and she had scarcely set her foot on it before it moved out toward the New York shore. The fog was heavy and for all her weariness, she stood in the bow glad to have the damp air blow in her face. Staring afar off, she dreamily rubbed the rouge from her face.

Gradually, in spite of her physical exhaustion, in spite of the fever which seemed to scorch her at intervals like gusts from a furnace door, her cool and steady mind asserted itself. She had imagined that she was at the end of her strength after her mad rush to Fordham and Mrs. Hallam's and home again; but now, after a series of adventures wild enough to satisfy a movie heroine, she felt suddenly restored, quite cool and able to reason.

She had married Cleve Winsor. She gave a gasp as she thought of it and had to clench her fists to keep herself from sobbing. She did not love Cleve Winsor. Oh, what had ever made her imagine that she did? She saw again the whole terrible ceremony in the dingy room over the bar-room, the leering lips of the half-drunken Magistrate — and that slow, salacious wink.

The marriage must be annulled, or if that was impossible, she must get a divorce. She moaned faintly at the ghastly absurdity of it all. She must see a lawyer at once. Before the night was done she must see a lawyer and give him a record of every minute of her time since ten o'clock last evening. He must be able to prove in court beyond question that she had never lived with the man she had married.

What lawyer?

She leaped on the landing-bridge at Forty-second Street before the gears of the adjustment-wheels had fairly ceased to clank. There was a taxi outside the ferry-house. She forgot for the moment that she had only ninety cents in her pocket and told him to rush for all that was in him to a certain number on Riverside Drive.

The house of the Paraways was dark, but the frantic pushing of the bell was not left long unanswered. Mr. Paraway himself appeared in a heavy dressing-gown that was not at all unbecoming.

If he was surprised to see Barbara Collingwood standing outside his front door at one-thirty in the morning, he did not show it. "Come in, Barbara," he said quietly. "We have all been worrying about you. Does your mother know you were coming here?"

"No," she answered breathlessly. "She — she doesn't know where I am."

"Perhaps I had better telephone her at once. She was somewhat upset. She will be relieved. The telephone is in my wife's sitting-room. Won't you come up?"

Barbara followed him. At the top of the stairs they were met by Mrs. Paraway in the most delicate of Japanese kimonos. Her hair was loose. She had rather fine hair, chestnut brown, streaked with gray, wavy and full. It framed the thin, delicate face very well.

Mr. Paraway found that he could not get Mrs. Collingwood's number. The wire was busy, he was told. It had been busy for twenty minutes or more. His wife meanwhile made no attempt to entertain her nocturnal caller. She felt possibly a little embarrassed; possibly she was conscious of the presence of great issues which made the kind of conversation which came most naturally to her tongue seem even to her a little cheap.

"You're shivering," she remarked instead. "Won't you have a cup of something warm? Or a toddy? I always declare, you know, that a hot toddy is not a drink but a benediction and is consequently not recorded in heaven."

Barbara refused the toddy and compromised on hot lemonade, figuring that a hot lemonade would take Mrs. Paraway at least to the pantry, one floor below, if not to the kitchen.

Her calculations proved correct. Mrs. Paraway departed on her errand of mercy. Mr. Paraway closed the door behind her.

"Whom did you wish to see here, Barbara?" he asked in a voice which he would have called judicial but any impartial critic would have called frigid. "Not Tom, I suppose?"

"Of course not."

Mr. Paraway liked the firm way in which she spoke the words.

"You have me puzzled."

"I came to see you, Mr. Paraway."

"Won't you please tell me?"

She rose from the deep chair in which she had been sitting and walked to the window. Abruptly, she turned. "I want your help. I — I have just been married to Mr. Winsor."

"You have just been — married?"

"Yes. Over a saloon in Hoboken. As soon as it was over, I — I knew it was a ghastly mistake. When Mr. Winsor's back was turned I ran away."

"I see, I see! You have had a rather terrible experience." He paused. Barbara was standing near the window. Her eyes were unnaturally bright and a little defiant; her cheeks, as a rule so rosy — either by nature or by artifice — were quite pale; her mouth and chin were set firm. "She is a little tigress at bay," said Mr. Paraway to himself; and decided that there was possibly more to Barbara Collingwood than he had supposed.

"Why did you come to me instead of going home?" he asked aloud.

"I want advice."

"Legal advice?"

"Yes."

"But I am not a divorce lawyer, Barbara."

"There was another reason."

"I thought there must be," he said quietly.

She hesitated. "I — I knew it might be very important for me to be able to prove that — that I had left Mr. Winsor immediately, immediately — after our marriage."

Mr. Paraway gave her a keen glance. "It was clever of you, in your natural excitement under the circumstances, to think of that. But, may I nevertheless ask why didn't you go home? I should have thought that naturally you would have gone home and then sent for, well, Tom, for instance. You have sent for Tom on other occasions." His voice was not without a touch of irony.

"I thought of that. But it occurred to me that Mother's evidence or — Tom's, might be considered — prejudiced. Any judge would realize that any one who cared for me would, under the circumstances, swear to anything in order to prove that the marriage — could be annulled."

Mr. Paraway raised his eyebrows. "You think any one would perjure himself — under the circumstances?"

"Of course. It would be just — priggish not to."

"I see, I see!" murmured Mr. Paraway, conscious that he was learning many things. "But, Barbara, surely I am not the only man you know whom a judge would consider incorruptible?"

"I wasn't thinking of that."

"Why, then, did you come to me?"

"I knew that you disliked me. I knew that there could be no trouble at all proving that. I suppose I could even prove that you and Mrs. Paraway wanted me to marry — Mr. Winsor. Naturally your evidence would count very much."

She was standing very erect, with one hand clutching the heavy hangings at the window. A flush had crept into her face again. Mr. Paraway began to wish that he were wearing day-clothes. A dressing-gown, even the most discreet and flowing, did put one at a disadvantage.

"Your father was an admirable lawyer," he remarked irrelevantly.

Barbara pretended not to hear that observation. "If you've got a pencil and paper," she said, "I'll tell you exactly where I was every minute between the time I left home and the time I arrived at this house."

He reached across the table. "I am ready, Barbara."

She told her story quickly and nervously but in full detail. In the middle of it, the hot lemonade arrived, escorted by Mrs. Paraway.

Barbara lifted her head. "I wonder if you'd mind — letting me talk alone — with Mr. Paraway?" she asked with the sweetest of smiles.

Mrs. Paraway's eyebrows went up.

"I think Barbara may speak with a little less constraint," Mr. Paraway suggested.

Mrs. Paraway smiled her curious, quizzical, twisted smile, shrugged her shoulders ever so slightly and disappeared in the direction of her bedroom, closing the intervening door behind her.

Barbara was conscious of a certain remote feeling of satisfied revenge.

"Continue, if you please," said Mr. Paraway.

Barbara finished her narrative.

"Do you know the name of the Magistrate?" Mr. Paraway interposed.

"I think it was Callahan."

"I don't suppose you noticed the number of the taxi?"

"No. But the driver will be coming to the house for his money."

"Good."

Barbara's hand slowly slid down the curtain to her side, and very slowly she crossed the room. "Do you think you will be able to get me free?"

He looked at her without stirring in his chair. "You are asking a great deal of me, Barbara. You are a clear-

headed girl. You must know very well that I am not eager to see you — free again? "

"I don't think you quite mean all you seem to mean" she answered slowly, after a pause. "You wouldn't really want me to be miserable with — Mr. Winsor. I don't think you would want me to live with him — against my will."

"You have been a very foolish young woman."

"You don't know what I've been up against." Her voice broke a little.

There was a long silence between them. "I think now," said Mr. Paraway, "you had better go home." Then, after a moment, he added, "Tom, by the way, is out in the byways and hedges looking for you. Your mother telephoned him at the same time she telephoned the police."

"The police! Heavens!" Barbara sank into a chair.

"Is your taxi waiting? "

"Yes," she murmured breathlessly.

"If you will wait a minute, I will dress and take you home. Perhaps you would like to telephone your mother? "

She did not answer. Mr. Paraway disappeared in the inner room. Barbara had to force herself by sheer will-power to overcome her dread of the reproach she knew would come to her over the wire that bound the house on Riverside Drive to the house on Fifty-seventh Street. She called her mother's number.

Silence. Then the voice of the operator sounding somewhat discouraged, "Wire's busy."

"Are you sure? "

"I don't know what's the matter with that number. It's been busy for almost an hour. The receiver is off the hook anyway."

Barbara felt a sudden cold chill of unreasoning apprehension.

XXVII

BARBARA ran up the steps she had descended (with Cleve Winsor's hand at her elbow) some four and a half hours previous. After a long wait, Matilda opened the door.

She turned and called to Mr. Paraway, waiting in the taxi below. "It's all right. Thank you for bringing me home. Good night." Her voice was tremulous with fear of the "scene" she knew awaited her with her mother. She turned again slowly, reluctant to enter the house. For a second she almost wished she had stayed with Winsor and faced what there was to face. She would now, she told herself, be speeding westward —

She flung back her head in the way she had when there was a fight ahead, and entered the house. "Where's Mother?" she asked sharply.

Her mother, Matilda told her, had gone to bed. Matilda herself was full of yawns, having, Barbara surmised, been allowed to sleep through whatever excitement Barbara's departure had occasioned. It was like her mother, in difficult hours not to want to be bothered with an inquisitive servant.

It was not like her mother, however, to go to bed on such occasions. She had evidently dropped asleep, watching for her. Barbara felt a twinge of regret.

She snapped out the hall light and ascended the stairs, conscious suddenly of her own physical exhaustion. And there was still ahead of her a "scene" with her mother. "Lord!" she murmured half aloud. "Lord, I can't go

through a talkfest. I can't. I simply can't." She laid her hand across her forehead and leaned for an instant against the wall.

The door of her own room was open and tempted her to enter and throw herself on the bed if only for a minute before waking her mother. She resisted. She was fully aware that after so mad an escapade, she owed her mother — to put it mildly — the amenity of a how-do-you-do. That was not duty, that was plain good sportsmanship: you grin when you are licked whether you enjoy grinning under those circumstances or not, and you shake hands with your opponent. If he wants to crow over you, you bear that too. You merely resolve to fight a little more intelligently next time.

It was in that spirit that her hand fell on the knob of her mother's door and after a last instant of hesitation, turned it. There was light in the room. She pushed open the door. Her mother was not on the patent Davenport which was her bed. Barbara had scarce expected she would be.

She entered the room, gasped and gave a frightened cry.

Mrs. Collingwood was lying, huddled, face upward, on the floor beside the little table on which the telephone instrument always stood. She was holding the transmitter tightly in her right hand; the receiver lay on her breast.

No wonder Central had been unsuccessful in ringing her number.

Barbara stared, gasping and whimpering, unable to move. "Mother!" she whispered. "Mother!" She lurched forward to secure the support of a chair-back; then drew herself slowly from one piece of furniture to another toward the place where her mother lay. At last she stood beside her, afraid to trust herself yet to bend down, for her head was swimming. She clenched her fists and breathed deeply in and out.

Her eye caught the telephone instrument and with the knowledge of an obvious course of action came a sudden influx of strength.

The hand that clutched the transmitter would not let it go. Barbara moaned at the horror of that cold, white hand and knelt on the floor. For a while it seemed she would never find voice to speak.

"Central!" she called frantically at last.

No one answered.

Again and again she called. Then the realization overcame her that Central, having decided that the receiver was off the hook for the night, had evidently decided to pay no more attention to the refractory wire.

"Matilda!" she called.

Matilda did not answer, though Barbara called again and again.

Her own strength seemed to grow as she realized that she was to have no help. She tore off her hat and flung it on the floor; she tore off her fur-coat, her jacket, her gloves. Then swiftly and with an expertness which would have surprised even her if she had been conscious of it, she straightened out her mother's huddled form, thrust a pillow under her head, loosened her waist.

"It's her heart!" she said half aloud. "She knew it was acting queer. And I wouldn't believe it." She suddenly found herself weeping. "Oh, idiot, idiot, idiot!" she moaned. "Oh, Mother, what a fool I was!"

She laid her hand on her mother's heart. There was a barely perceptible, irregular palpitation.

She ran for water, for spirits of ammonia. Ten minutes later it seemed to her that the tragic lines of suffering in her mother's face had softened a little. The fingers that clutched the transmitter relaxed and lay limp beside it.

Barbara picked up the instrument, calling "Central! Central!" as though she expected her voice to carry of

itself to the vague Somewhere that held the unregarding operator.

Help came from an unexpected quarter, for Matilda, a good quarter hour after she had been summoned, appeared. "You call me, Miss Barbara?" she asked stolidly, and screamed as she suddenly discovered the pale form beside which Barbara was kneeling. She screamed three times at the top of her lungs; then suddenly was the stolid Matilda again, waiting for orders. Barbara smiled in spite of everything at the absurdity of the "upstairs girl's" mechanical expression of horror; and sent her flying for a doctor.

Ten minutes passed. Then she heard the front door close behind the not very brainy but kind-hearted Matilda. With a shudder she realized that she was now alone in the house, alone with innumerable clocks and her mother, unconscious, barely alive, stretched on the floor, infinitely more full of reproach in her silence than she had ever been in her speech. Barbara rubbed her hands and her feet, feeling abjectly, pitifully humble and ashamed and eager to atone.

The minutes followed one another slowly, and with countless terrifying creakings, and inexplicable rattlings of distant doors. Barbara heard her mother sigh ever so faintly.

"Mother!" she cried softly.

There was no answer; and Barbara continued her vigil, wondering when the doctor would come, and, kneeling there beside her mother, beginning to understand a great many things which Mrs. Collingwood, in health and vigor, had never been able to make clear.

She heard a motor come down the street and stop in front of the house. An instant later, the door-bell rang. The doctor had come sooner than Barbara had allowed herself to hope was possible. She ran down the stairs and flung open the door.

But it was not the doctor who entered. It was Cleve Winsor.

She screamed and instinctively thrust her open hands in his face. He was taken by surprise and for half a minute blinded by her finger-nails striking his eyes. She leapt for the stairs, exclaiming in despair at her narrow skirts. She reached her mother's room in time to slam the door in his face, lock it, and leap to the folding door which led to her own room. The door stuck; then suddenly yielded, just in time.

He hammered on the door. "Open up!" She did not answer. "I'll break the door!"

She had fled to the farthest corner of the room, but now she returned quickly and courageously to the door she had last closed. He was thumping on it with both fists.

"Cleve," she called, trying to keep her voice steady, "don't do that. Please. Mother is ill. Mother is terribly ill."

"I don't believe it!" he bellowed.

"It's true, Cleve. Really. She's — she's unconscious."

"Let me see for myself."

"I can't, Cleve."

"I'll break open the door!"

She did not answer.

But Young Lochinvar was evidently not yet ready for violent methods. "What did you mean by running away the way you did?"

She hesitated.

"Can't you say something?" he shouted.

"I ran away because I suddenly knew I'd — made — a terrible mistake."

"What do you think you're going to do about it?"

"Please go away, Cleve. I've got to tend to Mother. Please."

"You can't get out of it."

"Please don't shout that way. If Mother wakes up it'll frighten her."

He banged the panels of the door. "Let me in!"

"I won't!"

"You haven't a right to keep me out. I'm your husband."

A clock struck three somewhere.

"I'll never let you in!" she cried with a sudden sob.

The finality of the words infuriated him. He flung his shoulder against the door. A panel cracked loudly.

In the silence that followed Barbara thought she heard her mother whispering her name.

"Cleve, Cleve!" she cried. "Be good. Please, please."

Again he threw himself against the door. It held fast.

The door-bell sounded.

"Who's that?" asked Cleve.

"The doctor!" she cried, almost hysterical in her relief.

"Shout out of the window that you don't want him."

But a deep voice in the hall below interposed. "The door was open. Shall I come right up?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" cried Barbara.

Cleve Winsor prepared to greet the intruder "as he deserved" at the top of the stairs, but the physician's bulky frame decided him this time to choose the better part of valor in spite of his own superior strategic position. Barbara unlocked the hall door.

The doctor entered and was amazed to see Barbara close the door sharply behind him, evidently directly in the face of the man he had passed with a nod at the head of the stairs. Dr. Fane was an old friend of the family and he could not place the handsome young man.

"I heard a racket. It sounded like some one trying to break open a door. The young man outside — isn't a burglar, is he?"

Barbara looked up at him with steady eyes. "No, he's my husband. I married him about midnight. Then I ran away. Don't — let him come in. It would — kill Mother — to see him."

"Oh!" said Dr. Fane, and a little later he murmured "Ah!" and then he remarked mendaciously, "I understand," and calmly and quickly began to take off his gloves.

Barbara, choking suddenly, pointed to her mother still lying on the floor. The doctor knelt down beside her.

"I can help you lift her on the couch," whispered Barbara.

He turned his head. "Thank you, Barbara. I think I'd rather not risk it."

For a second Barbara thought her own heart had stopped beating.

The doctor bent over Mrs. Collingwood, speaking not a word. Barbara asked a question, tremulously, but he indicated with a gesture that he wished quiet.

"Barbara!" called Cleve Winsor peremptorily.

Dr. Fane gave an impatient wave of his hand without turning. Barbara ran on tiptoe to the door.

"You've got to keep quiet," she whispered sharply.

"I won't keep quiet!" Cleve shouted. "I'm your husband. I won't be treated this way." He rattled the door-knob.

Dr. Fane turned, speaking in a low, calm voice. "Your mother is slowly recovering consciousness. If she should be startled now, I'm afraid, Barbara, we won't be able — to keep her with us. Could you convey that to — your husband?"

Barbara winced, and swallowed hard. Then, throwing back her shoulders, she unlocked the door quickly and stepped into the hall. She closed the door behind her.

For an instant Cleve Winsor was too surprised to speak; and even when he had recovered, he did not utter a word.

For Barbara, with her open palms against the door, had in her eyes a look that made him cower. He edged away toward the stairs.

Barbara Collingwood, who, twelve hours before, had been only a bit of fluff and feathers blown by veering winds, had become an Angel with a Flaming Sword.

XXVIII

WHEN day broke, at six or thereabouts, the house on Fifty-seventh Street resembled for all the world the palace of the Princess who slept a hundred years. For Mrs. Collingwood, breathing regularly, was sleeping on her couch; Barbara, in a huddled heap, was sleeping outside the door she had so satisfactorily guarded; Cleve Winsor, crouching half way down the stairs, had forgotten his troubles and his desires and was snoring like a lumber-camp; and Matilda, stretched on the best satin sofa in the drawing-room, was dreaming of everything except the day's work.

Dr. Fane, making a tour of inspection, smiled, frowned, wondered and returned to the bedside of his patient. And there, listening to the deep and quiet breathing and watching the occasional nervous flutter of the delicate eyelids, he too lightly dropped off.

It was upon this scene of curious enchantment that Prince Charming, in the outward form and habiliments of Tom Paraway, entered about a quarter after six. The door was on the latch. That was Matilda's fault, for she had forgotten to release the lock after her return from the scurrying errand for the doctor. Tom, not being able to identify his benefactor, blessed fate in general for his good luck.

The hall was dim, for some one had turned out the electric light, and the early daylight coming through the silk curtain over the front door revealed only outlines. Tom heard competitive snoring and thought of drunken butlers. But in the Collingwood house were no more butlers. He could testify to that himself.

He entered the drawing-room. On the sofa lay a dark figure. Could it be that Barbara had crept in here —

The figure resumed its stentorian snores. No, that was not Barbara.

He hesitated, wondering what under the canopy he was to do next. He was the bearer of decidedly important tidings. He had assumed that the household would, under the circumstances be not only astir but agog. Mrs. Collingwood was always up and about at six. With Barbara's harassing adventure to occupy her mind he had rather supposed she would not have been to bed at all.

He had to see her, for he had something to tell her which she would be wanting to know; and her telephone was evidently out of order.

He went to the foot of the stairs. "Mrs. Collingwood," he called softly.

Mrs. Collingwood did not answer. But an indistinct shape half way up the stairs did.

"What's up now?" asked Cleve Winsor heavily.

"My eye!" ejaculated Tom, surprised but not at all disturbed. "See who's here! Young Lochinvar from Minnesota!"

"What are you talking about?" grumbled Cleve surlily.

"You poor cheap skate!" remarked Tom coolly and very genially, looking up at him. "You second-rate imitation of a Wild Man of Borneo! You dub of an affinity expert! You pitiful, little back-country cut-up!"

"What do you think you're doing anyway?" muttered the victim of all this eloquence.

"I'm waiting for you to come down and hit me," said Tom. "But I'm sort of afraid you won't do it. When you hit people you like to hit 'em from behind. That has its points too."

"Talk all you blame please," cried Cleve. "I got the girl."

"Yes, you did!"

Cleve tossed his head. "Bee and I were married last night," he remarked with airy nonchalance. Tom did not miss the fact that he designated Barbara by the nickname which hitherto he had been the only man privileged to use.

"Great work!" remarked Tom. "You're quite a hero, are you not?" His voice was most good-humored.

"Say, young feller," Cleve cried, "when do you think you're going to get through trying to say funny things about me?"

"Search *me!*" Tom exclaimed. "My guess is that I'll never get through — not to my dying day. I expect to remember some bit of foolishness about you when you and I knock at the Pearly Gates and St. Peter tells me please to come in and tells you that, since you were so 'straordinary wicked, you can go to ——"

"Do you want to fight?" growled Cleve.

"That's what I'm waiting for. You're almighty slow in coming to it."

"Well, I can tell you this much," Cleve sputtered. "I don't know how you feel about it, but I have fine feelings that won't let me make a row in a lady's house."

Tom had only one answer for that. There was, in fact, only one answer. But the curious thing about it was that that same answer came simultaneously from both ends of the stairs. Tom, at the foot, smiled, and the smile became a grin and the grin became a long, joyous, apparently inexhaustible chuckle; and from the top came a soft giggle that ran off into low, but ringing laughter.

Cleve turned indignantly, only to face a flame of a new sort in Barbara's refreshed and rejuvenated eyes. He turned again. Below, he met Tom's relentless chuckle. Between the two he stood speechless.

Barbara's hilarity was the first to give way, overcome by the sudden realization of certain inexorable facts. "Tom!" she cried. There was a note of pain in her voice.

"Hello!" he called cheerily. "Can I see your mother?"

"She's been awfully ill, Tom," she answered in low tones.

"Your mother — ill?" Somehow one did not connect illness with so shining a spirit as Mrs. Collingwood's.

"It's all right. She's going — to pull through. But — I guess — it was a close shave."

"I've got something I'd like to tell her."

"Can't you tell me?" There was a wistful, friendly note in her voice which Cleve resented.

"See here!" he cried. "If that man down there has any messages to convey to your mother he'll convey them through your husband. Understand?"

"I happened to telephone Father from the wilds of Jersey about two o'clock this morning," Tom remarked, ignoring Cleve Winsor. "He gave me a clue or two and I've been having a fine time ever since, following them up."

Cleve Winsor's expression became suddenly coarse. "What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about Jersey and motoring in the early morning and so on," responded Tom genially. "I rather like spending the night up."

"You're damn fresh," muttered Cleve sullenly, feeling evidently that the presence of Barbara demanded a return of the spirit militant. "For two cents I'd thrash you."

Tom dug into his pockets, drew out a handful of change, picked out a pair of pennies and threw them, with a long underhand, one at a time, at Cleve's feet. "There you are. Now's the time, if ever. You may not get another chance. Not with the lady in the gallery. And remember, she didn't see how beautifully you did it night before last."

Cleve Winsor did not move. He tried to look haughty, without much success; he pulled at his collar; he stared at

the ceiling; he glared at Tom Paraway, waiting patiently below.

"Tom," called Barbara softly. "Let me in on this. You're awfully queer."

"I can be queerer yet. You see if I can't."

He drew another penny from his pocket and tossed it after the others; and after that, a fourth.

"What in blazes do you think you're doing?" cried Cleve. "I'm not a slot machine."

"I'm trying to get you to come down and thrash me. But, say, old man, my pennies have given out. Here goes for a quarter." He tossed it with a grandiloquent gesture. "Bing!"

Cleve shuffled his feet and muttered violent, unintelligible things. But he did not budge from his place. Barbara watched him and her whilom suitor at the foot of the stairs in silent bewilderment as Tom tossed one coin after another at Cleve's feet. The last was a silver dollar. It hit the edge of Cleve's shoe-sole, bounded between the supports of the stair-rail and fell with a pleasant tinkle on the floor of the hall below.

"Now, you white rabbit," cried Tom with a grimmer note in his voice, "I've given you your chance to show what you're made of, and you've taken it and no mistake. Now come down from there!"

"You go straight to ——," cried Young Lochinvar.

"Oh, no!" interrupted Tom. "That isn't my destination. Heaven is *my* home. Come down from there!"

"You damn —"

"Come — down!" Tom commanded.

Cleve came slowly. The house seemed very silent as he reluctantly descended those eight or ten steps.

"Oh, Tom!" cried Barbara in a despairing wail. "He's my husband!"

"He's nothing of the sort!" Tom exclaimed.

"Oh, but he is!" she wailed.

Tom clutched him by the shoulder. "You cheap, good-for-nothing, cowardly, first-class rat! Don't worry. I'm not going to hurt you. But I advise you to take the next train West, and to take one that leaves the Grand Central. There's a warrant waiting for you in Jersey."

"You're crazy!" Cleve sputtered. "You're —"

"Your friend Callahan's in jail already."

"Callahan?" cried Barbara. "Why, he's the man who —"

"Callahan?" whispered Cleve.

"I saw him locked up nicely myself about an hour ago — fraud — conspiracy to deceive — white slave act — twenty years at least —"

"What are you giving us," Cleve exclaimed. "Didn't he marry us all right?"

Tom looked him in the eyes with a curious expression between contempt and fury in his own. Then he started slowly to ascend the stairs. On the second step he turned. "Oh, yes. He went through the forms. He did it well enough to fool Barbara which was all you thought necessary."

"Tom!" cried Barbara exultantly. "Tom!"

Tom paid no attention to her. "The trouble was that you hadn't bothered about a license. You preferred to bribe Callahan with fifty dollars to go through the motions without a license. Callahan's where he belongs and if I see you in two minutes standing where you are standing now, I'll tell the cop, who's waiting outside —"

"What!" ejaculated Cleve Winsor, diving for his coat.

"To take you where you ought to have been long ago. That's all, Young Lochinvar. I'm through. Get out!"

Cleve Winsor got out, not stopping for farewells.

XXIX

BARBARA and Tom shook hands at the top of the stairs.

Shaking hands seems a simple ceremony, but there are a great many ways of conducting it; and between this way and that way, between the right way and the wrong way, between the hollow, stupid way and the way that seems a very palpitation of countless utterances too subtle for language, hangs all the world of space that lies between indifference and love.

Barbara and Tom shook hands the right way.

That was all.

And that is all there is to this story.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

THE following pages contain advertisements of a few of the Macmillan books on kindred subjects.

Where Do You Stand?

AN APPEAL TO AMERICANS OF GERMAN ORIGIN

BY HERMANN HAGEDORN

Boards 16mo, $.60

This is a fervent appeal to German-Americans to come out squarely and enthusiastically in support of the United States against Germany. Mr. Hagedorn thinks the question which he makes the title of his book is a fair question for Americans to ask and he urges that it is not enough for German-Americans merely to be loyal to the United States — they must make their loyalty whole-hearted and enthusiastic.

"A piece of reasoned justice, of kindliness and fair play, a logical and broad-minded, sympathetic argument that leads step by step to the unescapable plea for loyalty to America. It is a small book, and a remarkable one."— *New York Times.*

"He presents the case in a masterly and convincing fashion. . . . Amid a multitude of books about the war, Mr. Hagedorn's takes first place."— *Boston Transcript.*

"With a cool head and a warm heart, Mr. Hagedorn has written this appeal . . . in compelling and illuminating fashion." — *New Yorker Herold.*

"His words are clear, often refreshing in their frankness. . . . The note which the author strikes is that of a man who, being convinced himself, desires to draw the issues into the light and to open new perspectives."— *New Yorker Staats-zeitung.*

"It is one of the few perfectly sane and perfectly sincere things brought forth by the war."— George Seibel, *Volksblats und Freiheits-Freund.*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
Publishers 64–66 Fifth Avenue New York

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Faces in the Dawn

By HERMANN HAGEDORN

Cloth, 12mo, $1.35

A great many people already know Mr. Hagedorn through his verse. "Faces in the Dawn" will, however, be their introduction to him as a novelist. The same qualities that have served to raise his poetry above the common level help to distinguish this story of a German village. The theme of the book is the transformation that was wrought in the lives of an irritable, domineering German pastor and his wife through the influence of a young German girl and her American lover. Sentiment, humor, and a human feeling, all present in just the right measure, warm the heart and contribute to the enjoyment which the reader derives in following the experiences of the well-drawn characters.

"A Christmas story, unusual and welcome. . . . All the people in the tale are real human beings." — *New York Times.*

"A good substantial story . . . written in plain, homely, and convincing prose." — *New York Globe.*

Poems and Ballads

New Edition. Cloth, 12mo, $1.25

"We can see from this volume that Mr. Hagedorn is a truly accomplished poet . . . the poems are worth writing and are worth reading, because Mr. Hagedorn only writes what he really feels, and this volume will strike in many a reader a responsive chord." — *Poetry Review* (England).

"Hermann Hagedorn's work suggests a keynote for all future poetry." — Alfred Noyes.

". . . contains an unusual amount of pure poetry." — *New York Times.*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

Publishers 64–66 Fifth Avenue New York

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The Great Maze
and
The Heart of Youth

A POEM AND A PLAY

12mo, $1.35

"The two poems in this book, one in the form of a play, are of a lofty and moving beauty that has the further grace of an exquisite simplicity. . . . It is long since words so sharply moving and so distinctly beautiful have been given to the world. . . . Here . . . is sheer poetry, here are thoughts and emotions with which it is a high privilege to be associated."

— *New York Times.*

"The testimony of beauty is in Mr. Hagedorn's poem and play. . . . He has the poet's passion and vision, and the perfect art with which to clothe them. And he has besides these the wisdom of understanding human nature, human life.

"Beautiful, powerful, unfolding itself from the beginning with simply, but imaginatively and melodiously wrought lines of blank verse, this poem is the finest thing Mr. Hagedorn has done, and another addition to the glowing power in contemporary poetry.

"This is a singularly rich volume in vision and spiritual fervor, and gives to Mr. Hagedorn's art the seal of accomplishment."— *Boston Transcript.*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

Publishers 64–66 Fifth Avenue New York

You Are the Hope of the World

Decorated boards, 50 cents.

AN APPEAL TO THE GIRLS
AND BOYS OF AMERICA

BY HERMANN HAGEDORN

"Addressed to the girls and boys of America, this little book should likewise be read by all their fathers and mothers."

—*From Colonel Theodore Roosevelt's Fourth of July Oration.*

"A lofty purpose has animated Mr. Hagedorn in his exhortation of young America."

—*New York Evening Mail.*

"There is inspiration for boys and girls in Mr. Hagedorn's book. If every public school child ten years old and over were compelled to read it the prospects are that it would bear fruit in better conditions in the future."

—*Philadelphia Ledger.*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
Publishers 64–66 Fifth Avenue New York

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Makers of Madness

Cloth, 12mo, $1.00

Written with fine spirit, dramatic and fascinatingly interesting, "Makers of Madness" is a contribution of considerable importance to the literature which has for its purpose the promotion of international peace. While it does not in any way reflect the actual conditions in any one nation of Europe, it nevertheless contrasts the causes by which war might be brought about between a great Continental Power and the United States. Throughout the intense story there is introduced much significant comment on governments and the factors which control their relationships. "Makers of Madness" demonstrates that its author is as good a dramatist as he is novelist and poet.

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

Publishers **64–66 Fifth Avenue** **New York**

JUL 10 1918

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0002199621A